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MARK'S MESSIANIC SECRET AND ITS IMPLICATIONS
FOR THE CHURCH'S MINISTRY

A Dissertation
Presented to
the Faculty of the
School of Theology at Claremont

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Religion

by
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This dissertation, written by

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*under the direction of his Faculty Committee,
and approved by its members, has been presented
to and accepted by the Faculty of the School of
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PREFACE

Just who was Jesus of Nazareth? Was he the Messiah? If so, then why did he die? How is his death related to his Messiahship? These are some of the questions which Mark seeks to answer, and they are basic to the whole problem of the messianic secret.

The primitive Church was in danger of completely losing sight of the earthly Jesus. Its object of faith and worship was the exalted Christ and, with a sort of sublime indifference the first Christians, with Paul, were not concerned to know Christ after the flesh (II Corinthians 5:16). Faith was based primarily upon the Resurrection, and the necessity of the crucifixion was not understood--if the sermon of Peter on the day of Pentecost can in any way be regarded as authentic and representative: ". . . God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified" (Acts 2:36). Even though Paul had stressed somewhat the necessity of Jesus' death, it is really a death/resurrection which he preached and Romans 1:1-4 would indicate that the resurrection was by far of greater importance for Paul as far as Jesus' Messiahship was concerned.

It was Mark who first recognized that the glory of God is revealed most splendidly in the humanity of Jesus. Jesus was not just the messenger of God or the revelation of God; he is the one who brings new life--he is the founder of

a new humanity. Thus, for Mark, Christ is most divine where he is most human and, consequently, the earthly ministry of Jesus is a very real and vital part of his Messiahship. Mark presents, then, for the very first time to the early Christian community a radically different concept of just what kind of Messiah Jesus was: he was a suffering servant Messiah who found victory through death.

And what kind of disciples will this Messiah have? They, too, will journey the way of self-denial, willingly take up their crosses, and thus, will find life through following Christ. They, too, will be dying and rising, suffering and glorified servants. The Gospel of Mark is very perplexing at many points, but this one point is crystal clear: the way of the Christ is the way of the Cross, and the way of the disciple is the way of the Master. If there can never be any cheap grace, as Bonhoeffer says, it is equally true that there can never be any cheap discipleship, for cheap discipleship is no discipleship at all.

The enigma of Mark was first unfolded to me in a seminar on the Gospel of Mark taught by Professor Eric Lane Titus. It was there that my interest in the messianic secret was first stimulated, and this dissertation is an outgrowth of that earlier study. I owe a great debt to Professor Titus; he suggested both the theme and title for this study, and I appreciate his patient guidance and wise counsel throughout my studies with him. Special thanks is

also due Professor K. Morgan Edwards and Dean F. Thomas Trotter for serving on my dissertation committee. Their penetrating questions and helpful suggestions during my oral qualifying examination were of particular value in the practical application of this study in the concluding chapter.

A further acknowledgement of gratefulness is extended to the congregation which I have served throughout the past five and one half years--First Church of God, Corona, California. Without the consent and patient endurance of these kind folk, these studies could not have been undertaken. I also appreciate the cooperation of our children, Bobby, Cindy, Sandy and Shelly, who so often had to play quietly while Mother was typing and Daddy was studying. Finally, my deepest gratitude goes to my wife, Sara, to whom this dissertation is dedicated. Without her constant encouragement, hard work and sacrifice, this objective would never have become a reality.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

I. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The importance of the Gospel of Mark can scarcely be overemphasized. It is almost certainly the earliest of the Gospels,¹ and equally certain is the dependence of the other three Gospels upon it as both a source and pattern.² Consequently, our understanding of Mark affects our understanding of the other Gospels, and the problems of Mark, then, are of utmost significance.

Among the foremost problems of Mark is that of the hidden Messiah. To begin with, Jesus alone knows of his Messiahship. Then the demoniacs recognize who he is, but they are commanded to silence. Eventually it begins to dawn upon the disciples that Jesus is the Messiah, but they,

¹William R. Farmer, in his recent work, The Synoptic Problem: A Critical Analysis (New York: Macmillan, 1964), defends the priority of Matthew and suggests that Mark was written about A.D. 100-125, as a compromise between Matthew and Luke. However, Farmer simply does not adequately answer the questions raised, and secondly, he does not deal with other problems which are equally significant--e.g., the messianic secret of Mark. One can only conclude that the nineteenth century two-document hypothesis, as modified by Burnett Hillman Streeter's basic conclusions in his monumental work, The Four Gospels: A Study of Origins (London: Macmillan, 1924), remains unshaken.

²Eric Lane Titus, Essentials of New Testament Study (New York: Ronald Press, 1958), p. 154.

too, are forbidden to make it known. Finally, in his trial before the high priest, Jesus himself reveals the secret.

But, why the secret? Did Jesus ever claim to be the Messiah, or did his disciples ever truly recognize him as such? These two questions would seem to be answered by the actions of the disciples from the moment of the Last Supper until some time after the crucifixion. Is the "messianic secret," then, a literary device on the part of Mark? If so, what is its purpose?

The problem and the purpose of the messianic secret, however, does not stand alone. Unless one concludes that the hidden Messiah is the one controlling theme of Mark, then it becomes just one of several factors which must in some way mesh together in the overall purpose and structure of the Gospel. One does not go very far into the question of the secret until he discovers that there are, in fact, many other problems which must also be capable of being answered by any proposed solution to the problem of the messianic secret. For example, this Gospel is obviously intended for a people undergoing persecution. Likewise, it is "addressed" to believers. Yet, it is a Gospel--an entirely new form of literature. But, would not the old Pauline epistle-type of literature be quite sufficient to encourage people who were facing martyrdom? Perhaps it would serve the purpose even better than a Gospel in some respects.

There are other problems, too. If it is primarily a

resurrection story with a long introduction, as some have suggested, then why does it end so abruptly? Or, if it is primarily a passion story, as others believe, then why does it have such a long introduction? If its main purpose was to say, in effect, "Be not afraid; the Son of Man will return soon!" then, why does it end on a note of fear-- "ἐφοβοῦντο γάρ"--if indeed it does end at 16:8?

Again, if this Gospel is merely the result of someone's attempt to preserve the traditions of Jesus for posterity, then there are several "whys" which must go unanswered: Why preserve the traditions by writing in the first place if the Son of Man is returning so soon (13:20, 30, 33, 35-37)? Why preserve only a few of the traditions when there were no doubt many others in which posterity would be equally interested (3:23; 4:2, 33-34; 12:1)? Why collect and combine the traditions together since many of the author's sources were no doubt already in written form?

These are some of the many questions which call for attention as one confronts the problem of the messianic secret, and any proposed solution must not easily be excluded by any reckoning with these other questions, either individually or collectively. Therefore, this study of the messianic secret is entered into with many other problems in mind, although only two will be central and dealt with at length: What is the function of the messianic secret in the overall purpose of Mark, and what then are its implications

for the church's ministry? It is especially because of these many other questions that the second chapter is devoted to a study of the background against which the Gospel of Mark was written. And this background investigation must explore any relationship between Mark and Romans because, as Eric Lane Titus suggests, it may not be

. . . accidental that the church at Rome, which was the recipient of Paul's most formal attempt to present his gospel, was the first to produce a Gospel. But the gap between the letter to the Romans and the first Gospel has never been bridged.³

It is hoped that this study can at least shed some light, be it ever so meager, on this gap of which Titus speaks.

II. AUTHORSHIP

External evidence. A statement by Papias which is preserved in Eusebius' The Ecclesiastical History has long been the starting point for any historical or literary analysis of the Gospel of Mark. Papias was bishop of Hierapolis in Asia Minor and was prominent in the Church ca. A.D. 125-150. He was an avid collector of oral tradition and was the author of a five-volume work entitled Interpretation of the Lord's Oracles. However, his writings have been lost for centuries and only fragments survive in the works of Irenaeus, Eusebius, and some medieval Byzantine writers. With regard to the author of Mark, Eusebius quotes

³Ibid., p. 155.

Papias as follows:

. . . we are now obliged to append to the words already quoted from him a tradition about the Mark who wrote the Gospel, which he expounds as follows. "And the Presbyter used to say this, 'Mark became Peter's interpreter and wrote accurately all that he remembered, not, indeed, in order, of the things said or done by the Lord. For he had not heard the Lord, nor had he followed him, but later on, as I said, followed Peter, who used to give teaching as necessity demanded but not making, as it were, an arrangement of the Lord's oracles, so that Mark did nothing wrong in thus writing down single points as he remembered them. For to one thing he gave attention, to leave out nothing of what he had heard and to make no false statements in them.'" This is related by Papias about Mark. . . .⁴

Scholars seem to be in general agreement that the "presbyter's" testimony is limited to the second sentence, and that the rest is Papias' explanation of it. F. C. Grant sets forth the view that "there may be more of inference than of tradition in Papias' supplement to the words of the presbyter."⁵ Papias is on the defensive; Mark's order has been attacked, and Papias is defending it as simply Mark's remembrances of Peter's occasional sermons and teachings. Thus, Papias' point is that Mark's aim was not exact chronological order, but rather complete and accurate reporting.⁶

Another early statement of authorship is that from the Anti-Marcionite Prologue to Mark (ca. A.D. 150-180):

⁴Eusebius, The Ecclesiastical History, III.39.15. (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1926), I, 297.

⁵Frederick C. Grant, The Gospels: Their Origin and Their Growth (New York: Harper & Bros., 1957), p. 74.

⁶Ibid.

Mark declared, who is called "Stump-fingered" because he had small fingers in comparison with the size of the rest of his body. He was Peter's interpreter. After the death of Peter himself he wrote down this same gospel in the parts of Italy.⁷

Irenaeus (ca. A.D. 180), too, agrees in general with the statement of Papias:

Matthew also issued a written Gospel . . . while Peter and Paul were preaching at Rome, and laying the foundations of the Church. After their departure, Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, did also hand down to us in writing what had been preached by Peter.⁸

There are other early references to this Gospel being Peter's reminiscences, but some are only indistinct allusions. More important, though, there are none which contradict this strong tradition in the early Church that the author of Mark was the associate of Peter. This view went unchallenged until the nineteenth century, and it is still accepted by some. C. E. B. Cranfield, for instance, says that this "unanimous tradition of the early church . . . is not open to serious doubt."⁹

Internal evidence. In this day in which so much attention has been given to form criticism, this view of Cranfield is almost incredible. Of course, his view was

⁷C. E. B. Cranfield, "Gospel of Mark," The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, III, 268.

⁸Irenaeus, "Against Heresies," III.1.1 in The Ante-Nicene Fathers. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), I, 414.

⁹C. E. B. Cranfield, The Gospel According to St. Mark (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), p. 5.

was also that of E. F. Scott and E. J. Goodspeed, but these two men were writing from the standpoint of literary criticism, and in a day when such position had not yet been sufficiently challenged by the form critics.

There are, however, several things within Mark which would seem to support the idea that it contained the reminiscences of Peter, as set down by an interpreter. Scott points out that the story properly begins at the point where Peter becomes acquainted with Jesus, and next to Jesus, the most prominent figure in this Gospel is Peter. Also, the scenes most fully described are those in which Peter was present, especially those which took place around Peter's home in Capernaum, where Jesus stayed. Moreover, Scott maintains

. . . that whenever we come to incidents at which Peter was not present there is a falling off in the life-like quality of the narrative; we no longer have the impression that we are hearing a story at first-hand.¹⁰

E. J. Goodspeed similarly concluded that

. . . on the whole, it must be agreed that the Gospel of Mark comes very near being the memoirs of Peter . . . which were written down from memories soon after the martyrdom of Peter . . . by one of his Greek-speaking interpreters in Rome.¹¹

¹⁰ E. F. Scott, The Literature of the New Testament (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932), p. 57.

¹¹ Edgar J. Goodspeed, An Introduction to the New Testament (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1937), p. 138.

In spite of all this, there are some great difficulties in the way of identifying this Gospel in toto with the reminiscences of Peter, and of identifying the author with any one person, especially the "John Mark"¹² of Acts 12, 13; Colossians 4:10; II Timothy 4:11; Philemon 24; and I Peter 5:13. Several narratives show definite signs of having passed through the processes of oral tradition and which, by frequent repetition, became molded into a rounded form (e.g., 2:18-20; 2:23-26; 3:31-35). Also, in addition to narratives which seem to be units of oral tradition, there are two other kinds of narratives in this Gospel: those constructed by the author on the basis of oral tradition (e.g., 3:13-19; 6:6b-13; 6:14-16; 6:30-33; 6:53-56), and those narratives or brief statements which indicate what was happening in a summary form (e.g., 1:14-15; 3:7-12; 4:33-34).

Moreover, there is a considerable amount of sayings material, similar to Q, evidently preserved as independent units of tradition. Many scholars believe that collections of sayings were made by various churches and that the author drew upon a collection in use in the church of Rome.

A further difficulty is that while the author may

¹²This is really a misnomer since the two names are never put together in the New Testament. He is simply "John whose other name was Mark" (Acts 12:12, 25), or "John called Mark" (Acts 15:37).

have been familiar with events and conditions in Jerusalem, he was certainly unfamiliar with the history, geography, and customs of Northern Palestine (6:14, 17; 7:11, 31). Also, it is highly unlikely that a Jew of Jerusalem would be as unfamiliar with Jewish procedure as the account of the trial of Jesus suggests. On the other hand, the author's supposed familiarity with events in Jerusalem can be explained by the formulation of the passion narrative at a very early date.

Finally, in view of the author's general attitude toward the Jews, he can hardly be the "John Mark" of Acts and other New Testament passages. The author does not write as a Jew, even as a Christian Jew. For example, in 7:3, the author is obviously mistaken when he says that "all the Jews" observe the custom of washing hands before eating. Further, as F. C. Grant points out, "there is an undeniable element of anti-Judaism in Mark. . . . Slight as this trace is, Mark can hardly be the work of a Palestinian Christian Jew."¹³

Conclusion. The Gospel itself is anonymous, but the external tradition strongly, consistently, and from a very early date points to "Mark" as the author, and that his work was based on the preaching and teaching of Peter. The internal evidence bears out the view that parts of the Gospel

¹³Frederick C. Grant, "The Gospel According to St. Mark: Introduction," The Interpreter's Bible, VII, 633.

are quite likely based on eye-witness accounts. However, it also reveals that much of the Gospel is definitely not from an eye-witness account. Indeed, several sources other than that of the eye-witness source are very much in evidence. This has led the majority of critics to a position similar to that of F. C. Grant where he states:

Certainly the view that the Gospel as a whole is based upon Peter's recollections . . . is untenable. . . . The probability is that Mark's Gospel is a compilation of the oral tradition current in the Christian community at Rome in the sixties.¹⁴

As for the author being the Mark known to us from elsewhere in the New Testament, this does not seem to be very likely, in spite of the strong and early tradition. It adds nothing to our knowledge of the Gospel to attribute it to this Mark, nor does it add to our knowledge of the man himself. The theory that the author was the young man of 14:51-52 is most improbable, especially in view of Papias' statement that Mark neither heard Jesus nor was he his personal follower. Consequently, the weight of evidence leads to the conclusion that the Gospel of Mark is quite likely by someone named Mark, but hardly the "John Mark" of New Testament fame. And more important, the Gospel is not the reminiscences of Peter per se, though his preaching and teaching may have been the basis for some of the oral traditions or written sources which lie behind the resultant Gospel.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 630.

III. DATE

It was noted above that both the Anti-Marcionite Prologue to Mark (ca. A.D. 150-180), and Irenaeus (ca. A.D. 180), explicitly state that Mark was written after the death of Peter. Further, this seems clearly borne out in the Gospel itself by the striking frankness with which Peter is discredited by certain details (8:33; 14:33ff., 66ff.). There is wide acceptance among scholars that Peter was martyred in the Neronian persecution of A.D. 64-65, although there have been a few voices raised in favor of a much earlier date based on Acts 12:17. But if the later date is correct, as most scholars believe,¹⁵ then a terminus a quo of A.D. 65 is established for this earliest Gospel.

Mark is clearly a source for both Matthew and Luke; this means that it must have had some circulation outside Rome, and that it also had attained a rather high degree of authority. Consequently, a date beyond A.D. 75 is almost impossible. The great majority of scholars favor a date of A.D. 65-67, but Wellhausen, Bacon, Branscomb, Beach, Scott, and Nineham date the Gospel subsequent to the Fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, primarily on the basis of chapter 13. There are two notable extremes in attempting to date this Gospel. C. C. Torrey suggests a date of A.D. 39-40, and

¹⁵D. E. Nineham, The Gospel of Saint Mark (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1963), p. 41.

Branscomb dates it as late as A.D. 85. However, both are radical dates and, as such, are unanimously rejected by everyone else.

After weighing all the evidence, chapter 13 does not seem to necessitate a date after the Fall of Jerusalem, and a date of A.D. 65-67 is preferred in order to allow as much time as possible for circulation and influence to build up.

IV. PLACE OF COMPOSITION

The names of Peter, Mark, and Rome are first brought together as early as the end of the first century or the beginning of the second century A.D. by the author of I Peter. Writing as if he were the apostle, the author says, "She [i.e., the church] who is at Babylon, who is likewise chosen, sends you greetings; and so does my son Mark" (5:13). As Beach points out, Babylon is clearly an epithet for Rome and "the simplest interpretation is that the writer used these names because Peter and Mark were both celebrated figures in the history of the congregation in Rome. . . ." ¹⁶

The next fairly clear statements are those of the Anti-Marcionite Prologue, which stated that it was composed "in the parts of Italy," ¹⁷ and the implication of Irenaeus

¹⁶Curtis Beach, The Gospel of Mark (Harper & Brothers, 1959), p. 56.

¹⁷Supra, p. 5.

that it was written in Rome.¹⁸ The first definite statement of Roman origin, though, comes from Clement of Alexandria (ca. A.D. 200), who is quoted by Eusebius as follows:

. . . the Gospel according to Mark came into being in this manner: When Peter had publicly preached the word at Rome, and by the Spirit had proclaimed the Gospel, that those present, who were many, exhorted Mark, as one who had followed him for a long time and remembered what had been spoken, to make a record of what was said; and that he did this, and distributed the Gospel among those that asked him. And when the matter came to Peter's knowledge he neither strongly forbade it nor urged it forward.¹⁹

There is another statement of Clement, this one preserved in Latin and, thus, one which comes to us more directly than the one above.

Mark, the follower of Peter, while Peter was preaching publicly the gospel at Rome in the presence of certain of Caesar's knights and was putting forward many testimonies concerning Christ, being requested by them that they might be able to commit to memory the things which were being spoken, wrote from the things which were spoken by Peter the Gospel which is called according to Mark.²⁰

There is, in fact, only one voice in antiquity which does not support the view of Roman origin. Chrysostom believed that the Gospel was composed in Egypt,²¹ but it is generally agreed by scholars that his testimony was based on

¹⁸Supra, p. 6.

¹⁹Eusebius, VI.14, op. cit., II, 49.

²⁰Cited in Vincent Taylor, The Gospel According to St. Mark (London: Macmillan, 1952), p. 6.

²¹Ibid.

an ambiguous statement of Eusebius: "They say that this Mark was the first to be sent to preach in Egypt the Gospel which he had also put into writing, and was the first to establish churches in Alexandria itself."²²

Looking within the Gospel itself, there are translations of Aramaic terms (3:17; 5:41; 7:11, 34; 15:22) and explanations of Jewish customs (7:3f.; 15:42), both of which clearly indicate that it was intended for Gentile readers.

There is also the fact of the early authoritative position which Mark attained. It is far easier to explain its use by both Matthew and Luke, and its continued preservation, if it had the support of the prestigious Roman church behind it. Consequently, a large majority of critics believe that the Gospel of Mark was composed in Rome, and that it was originally intended for Roman Christians.

Aside from all the above cumulative evidence, though, Curtis Beach states that "far more significant in establishing its Roman authorship is the message of the Gospel and its relations to Roman history."²³ This will be noted in the next chapter as the gap between Mark and Romans is explored.

²²Eusebius, II.16, op. cit., I, 145.

²³Beach, op. cit., p. 57.

CHAPTER II

THE BACKGROUND AGAINST WHICH MARK WAS WRITTEN

I. THE POLITICAL SITUATION

The prevailing situation in Rome at the time the Gospel was written is an important factor for a proper understanding of the Gospel of Mark. A century before the Gospel was written the Maccabean revolt was kicked off when the Seleucid king, Antiochus Epiphanes (175-164 B.C.), had his soldiers erect an altar to Zeus in the Temple in Jerusalem and had swine sacrificed upon it (December, 168 B.C.). At the same time all Jewish religious practices such as circumcision, Sabbath rest, and festival celebrations, were forbidden. Even to possess a scroll of the Torah was a capital offense. Worship of heathen gods became mandatory, and altars were set up throughout the land for pagan worship. It was not until three years later to the day that the Temple was cleansed and Jehovah worship inaugurated anew.¹

Memories of this must have been revived when anti-Semitic rabble-rousers in Alexandria demanded of their governor that statues of the Roman emperor, Caligula, be set

¹Robert H. Pfeiffer, History of New Testament Times (New York: Harper & Bros., 1949), pp. 13-16. This event of the cleansing of the Temple has been celebrated annually to the present day as the Hanukkah (Rededication) Feast.

up in all the synagogues and that the Jews be deprived of all their civic rights. The famous philosopher Philo led a delegation of Jews to Caligula seeking redress, but received no satisfaction. Resulting repercussions spread to Palestine and the Jews in Jamnia destroyed an altar in honor of Caligula. The "mad emperor," in turn then, ordered that a statue of himself be installed in the Jerusalem Temple, and also that pagan sacrifices be instituted (A.D. 40). Although Caligula was murdered before the order could be carried out, it nonetheless provoked riots among the Jews and heightened the already existing hostility between the hated rivals.²

The next emperor, Claudius (A.D. 41-54), succeeded Caligula only because he was acclaimed by the praetorian guard and the Roman senate was left with no alternative but to consent. He was partly paralyzed and had been regarded as stupid by his family and predecessors. But be this as it may, he was capricious enough and, although at the beginning of his reign he set upon a policy of suppressing the anti-Jewish activities which Caligula had begun, he later expelled many Jews from Rome, if not all of them, after the

²Ibid., pp. 37-38. This political summary is based upon Pfeiffer's History of New Testament Times, pp. 13-44, Curtis Beach, The Gospel of Mark (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1959), pp. 57-61, and James Henry Breasted, Ancient Times, A History of the Early World (2d ed. Boston: Ginn, 1944), pp. 696-707.

coming of the Christians to that city had created many disturbances, probably centering about the synagogues (Acts 18:1-4). The casual remark of Acts that "a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, lately come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome" (18:2), is corroborated by the Roman historian Suetonius:

Since the Jews constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus [impulsore Chresto], he expelled them from Rome.³

G. H. C. Macgregor states that this is "probably a reference to Jesus, who by a popular misunderstanding was supposed to be still alive, though Chrestus may have been quite a different person."⁴

Claudius' reign ended when he was poisoned by his wife Agrippina, who was also his niece, and the succession then passed to Agrippina's son, Nero (A.D. 54-68). James Henry Breasted states that "he cast aside all restraint and followed his own evil nature in a career of such vice and cruelty that the name of Nero has ever since been regarded as one of the blackest in all history."⁵ Over a period of

³Suetonius, "The Deified Claudius," The Lives of the Caesars, V.25. (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1924), II, 53.

⁴G. H. C. Macgregor, "The Acts of the Apostles: Exegesis," The Interpreter's Bible, IX, 241.

⁵Breasted, op. cit., p. 700.

time he condemned to death his old teacher and advisor, Seneca, and poisoned Britannicus, another close friend and advisor. He had the son of Claudius assassinated, and both his mother and his wife, Octavia, murdered. He exiled another friend and general, and took his wife.⁶

Roman Christians could not possibly have hoped to escape the havoc caused by this madman, and, indeed, they did not. On July 18, A.D. 64, a terrible fire broke out which raged for six days and destroyed most of the city, and rumors spread that the emperor himself started the fire in order to rebuild the city more splendidly. Breasted believes the rumors were probably unfounded,⁷ yet Nero had to divert attention from himself and, thus, he turned to the Christians. The horrible atrocities to which they were subjected have been vividly described by another Roman historian, Tacitus:

But neither human help, nor imperial munificence, nor all the modes of placating Heaven, could stifle scandal or dispel the belief that the fire had taken place by order. Therefore, to scotch the rumor, Nero substituted as culprits, and punished with the utmost refinements of cruelty, a class of men, loathed for their vices, whom the crowd styled Christians. . . . First, then, the confessed members of the sect were arrested; next, on their disclosures, vast numbers were convicted. . . . And derision accompanied their end: they were covered with wild beasts' skins and torn to death by dogs; or they were fastened on crosses, and, when daylight failed were burned to serve as lamps by night. Nero

⁶Beach, op. cit., p. 58.

⁷Breasted, op. cit., p. 701.

had offered his Gardens for the spectacle, and gave an exhibition in his Circus. . . . Hence . . . there arose a sentiment of pity, due to the impression that they were being sacrificed not for the welfare of the state but to the ferocity of a single man.⁸

There has been a very strong tradition going back to the first century that the Apostles Peter and Paul were martyred in Rome during this persecution under Nero. Clement, who was the third or fourth bishop of Rome, wrote to the church of Corinth right after the persecution of Domitian (A.D. 95), and refers back to an earlier persecution as a time when heroes of the faith faced a similar crisis in their day. This earlier persecution was undoubtedly that under Nero, and the agonies which Clement here mentions are very similar to those described above by Tacitus:

To these men [Peter and Paul] with their holy lives was gathered a great multitude of the chosen, who were the victims of jealousy and offered among us the fairest example in their endurance under many indignities and tortures. Through jealousy women were persecuted as Danaids and Dircae, suffering terrible and unholy indignities. . . .⁹

Eusebius explicitly states that both Peter and Paul were martyred during the reign of Nero, and he cites a certain Gaius of Rome (ca. A.D. 200) who attests that Paul was beheaded and Peter was crucified in Rome at the same

⁸Tacitus, The Annals, XV.44. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1937), IV, 283-285.

⁹I Clement 6:1-2 in The Apostolic Fathers (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1949), I, 19.

time.¹⁰

About two years after the fire a hundred years of very bitter Jewish resentment against the Romans came to a head when the procurator Florus misappropriated Temple funds and literally slaughtered the Jews who protested. He set his troops loose in the market place, and Josephus says that about 3,600 men, women and children were slain in one day.¹¹ Rome found a full scale rebellion on its hands at once; indeed, the terrible Jewish-Roman War was under way. Nero sent Vespasian, his most experienced general, to crush the "uprising." However, it was not to be easily put down, and the fighting did not finally end until the fall of Jerusalem four years later in A.D. 70. It would be almost impossible to adequately describe the unmitigated suffering, the horrors of starvation and the slaughter which the Jews endured. In the end, the battering rams, fire, and plundering troops of Rome left the holy city leveled.¹²

Palestine, however, was not the only province where Nero was facing deep trouble. He had undertaken to rebuild Rome with funds raised by heavy taxation, and this led to

¹⁰Eusebius, The Ecclesiastical History, II.25.
(New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1926), I, 181.

¹¹Flavius Josephus, "Wars," II.14 in his The Complete Works (Philadelphia: John E. Potter, n.d.), p. 566.

¹²Millar Burrows, "Jerusalem," The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, II, 865-866.

discontent in all the provinces. It was at this time and for this reason that Galba, a Roman governor in Spain, led his rebellious troops against Rome. In desperation the Senate condemned Nero to death as a public enemy, and named Galba as emperor. Nero, the last emperor in the line of Augustus, thereupon committed suicide by stabbing himself (A.D. 68).¹³

After Nero's death, the Empire was threatened by another long civil war as a succession of generals struggled for power--Galba, Otho, Vitellius, and Vespasian. Galba had only been emperor ten months when he was murdered at the instigation of Otho who, in turn, became emperor (A.D. 69). It had been Otho whose wife Nero had taken! Then, in only three months Otho committed suicide when his troops were defeated by Vitellius near the Po River in northern Italy.¹⁴

Vespasian, the commander heading up the war in Judea, decided to promote his own political cause, left the Jewish War to the leadership of his son Titus, and headed for Alexandria, Egypt. From there he directed his forces which defeated Vitellius' troops on the very same spot near the Po River where they, in turn, had defeated Otho only six months earlier. Vespasian's troops went on to sack Cremona,

¹³Breasted, op. cit., p. 702.

¹⁴Beach, op. cit., p. 59.

a city on the Po, and came on down and proceeded to fight their way into the city of Rome. Finally, after two months of bitter street fighting, and after much of the city was burned, Emperor Vitellius was killed and Vespasian, still in Alexandria, was recognized as emperor by the Senate. Thus, as Beach sums up the unstable situation, "Rome had four emperors within one year (A.D. 69), and the year ended with the burning of the Capitol and fighting in the city streets."¹⁵

It is readily apparent from this political summary that life for the Christians of Rome from A.D. 60-70 was filled with tension, fear, and uncertainties. They must have faced persecution almost daily throughout this decade; indeed, they must have been in a state of terror much of the time. The civil strife throughout the Empire, the succession of intrigues, suicides, and assassinations in government, the loss of their homes and places of business in the terrible fire, the wide spread hatred of the Jews, of whom the Romans thought the Christians were a sect--all this must have filled their hearts with fear. The risks involved in being a Christian could hardly be greater. That the faith of some wavered is explicit in the above quotation of Tacitus,¹⁶ and is implied in the repeated statements of

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Supra, p. 18.

Clement¹⁷ that the persecutions of Peter, Paul, and the many other martyrs, were due to jealousy and strife--like unto what was going on at that very moment in Corinth, the church to which he was writing.

All of these events must have heightened the wonderment of some that the long expected return of Jesus had not taken place. For others, the delay of the parousia must have led to despair. In either case, the situation literally demanded that something be done to give the Church both direction and faith. Mark's Gospel did just that.¹⁸ To those whose faith was wavering, Mark called for fidelity and insisted that only those who endure to the end will be saved (8:34-38; 13:13). And for those who wondered at the delay of Jesus' return, Mark assured them that all these troubles were a necessary prelude and, therefore, were to be expected (13:7).¹⁹

Actually, the meaning and impact of the entire thirteenth chapter can best be appreciated as an answer to the problems raised by the prevailing political situation. We know that when the Neronian persecution broke out, the

¹⁷I Clement 5-6 in The Apostolic Fathers, I, 17-19.

¹⁸There were too many urgent problems present and met by Mark to contend that the sole purpose of this Gospel was to meet the needs here described. However, because this need was so real, and the answer provided by Mark so apt, a secondary purpose of the Gospel seems quite apparent.

¹⁹Beach, op. cit., p. 62.

church of Rome consisted of "a great multitude,"²⁰ or, as Tacitus says, "vast numbers."²¹ C. H. Dodd says that this large size of the church no doubt helps to explain why it was looked upon as a public danger,²² and why Nero was so intent upon wiping it out. At several points Mark seems to be speaking directly to this situation:

And when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom . . . this is but the beginning of the sufferings (13:7-8).

But take heed to yourselves; for they will deliver you up to councils; and you will be beaten in synagogues; and you will stand before governors and kings for my sake . . . you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved (13:9, 13).

. . . in those days there will be such tribulation as has not been from the beginning of the creation which God created until now . . . (13:19).

Curtis Beach states the case well when he says that for the church of Rome, in desperate straits and in time of peril, the Gospel of Mark "is surely one of the most remarkable and moving testimonies of faith ever written."²³

²⁰I Clement 6:1 in The Apostolic Fathers, I, 19.

²¹Tacitus, The Annals, XV.44, op. cit., IV, 284. Translator John Jackson states: "The expression [multitudo ingens], of course, may mean anything. Gibbon compared the terms applied by Livy to the 7,000 people involved in the Bacchanalian scandals. . . ."

²²C. H. Dodd, The Epistle of Paul to the Romans (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1932), p. xxviii.

²³Beach, op. cit., p. 62.

II. STRIFE WITHIN THE CHURCH AT ROME

These external and political circumstances, bringing tension and persecutions, might have been expected to bind the Christians of Rome closer together; but such seems not to have been the case. Instead, to make matters worse, their ranks were almost certainly torn by inward strife and division, as Paul's letter to the Romans reveals.²⁴

²⁴It must be noted that some of the very best critics do not view Romans in this light at all. It seems to them that Paul is merely stating the ethical extension of his gospel in 14:1-15:13, and that no particular knowledge of strife within the Roman church is necessarily implied. This is the opinion of John Knox who asserts that "these words of exhortation are prompted not by any particular situation about which Paul knows in the Roman church, but, like most of the rest of this section, by more general considerations" (John Knox, "The Epistle to the Romans: Exegesis," The Interpreter's Bible, IX, 614).

F. W. Beare shares this view and says that "it is not at all certain that the apostle has any specific knowledge of the moral and spiritual conditions of his readers or of any problems that may be causing them concern . . . it seems likely that he is writing out of his wealth of experience with other Gentile churches, in the knowledge that Rome will need much the same kind of instruction as was required by Corinth" (F. W. Beare, "Letter to the Romans," The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, IV, 121).

C. H. Dodd, on the other hand, cautiously states of Romans 14 that "whether these were actually burning questions at Rome we do not know. It is likely enough. At any rate, these were the kind of questions that were bound to crop up. . . . There was thus room enough for controversy, whether or not it had actually broken out at Rome . . ." (Dodd, op. cit., p. 212).

It seems, though, that the nature of Paul's arguments, and his manner of stating them, warrant the even bolder conclusion of Paul S. Minear that "Paul's discussion in Romans 14 and 15 shows all too clearly that these

The significance of this implicit strife within the church which Romans reveals lies in the fact that the Gospel of Mark was written from Rome within fifteen years after that church had received its letter from Paul.²⁵ And that such deep-seated differences and problems within a congregation are not always healed in such short periods of time is clearly evidenced by the First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians. Here we find a continuance of the same problems among the Corinthians which Paul had faced some forty years earlier.²⁶

churches [congregations in Rome] were at odds with one another" [Paul S. Minear, The Gospel According to Mark (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1962), p. 12].

²⁵ Many scholars estimate the time to be much less than this. Paul S. Minear, for example, states that Paul's letter to the Romans "preceded Mark's work in Rome by less than a decade . . ." (Minear, op. cit., p. 11). However, the date of Romans cannot be determined any more exactly than can Mark's date, but undoubtedly it is to be placed between A.D. 52-59. John Knox writes: "Everything depends upon one's general conception of the chronology of Paul's life. I would date Romans not later than A.D. 53, but most students would place it about five years later" (John Knox, "The Epistle to the Romans: Introduction," The Interpreter's Bible, IX, 358). C. H. Dodd, on the other hand, states that "the most probable date for the Epistle to the Romans is in the first quarter of A.D. 59, but a year or two earlier is possible" (Dodd, op. cit., p. xxvi).

²⁶ In writing to the Corinthians Paul had been concerned about their dissensions (I Cor. 1:10), quarreling, and party spirit (I Cor. 1:11-12); also, some must have stressed eloquence and wisdom in preaching (I Cor. 1:17-26), and others were evidently boastful (I Cor. 1:29-31; II Cor. 10-12).

These very same problems were certainly still very much in existence in Corinth over a generation later. First

Throughout his entire ministry Paul had been involved in a struggle with Judaizers. Frequently his concepts of justification by faith and freedom in Christ had been misinterpreted, and more than anything else his letter to the Romans was an effort to clarify his gospel before a church which did not know him.²⁷ However, the Epistle

Clement (ca. A.D. 96) speaks of "jealousy and envy, strife and sedition . . ." and refers back to an earlier day in the church when similarly ". . . 'the worthless' rose up 'against those who were in honor,' those of no reputation against the renowned, the foolish against the prudent, the 'young against the old'" (3:2-3). Clement then goes on to say, "Wherefore let us obey his excellent and glorious will . . . let us turn to his pity and abandon the vain toil and strife and jealousy which leads to death" (9:1); "Let us, therefore, be humble-minded, brethren, putting aside all arrogance and conceit and foolishness and wrath, and let us do that which is written (for the Holy Spirit says, "Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, nor the strong man in his strength, nor the rich man in his riches, but he that boasteth let him boast in the Lord . . .)" (13:1).

Clement proceeds, then, to point directly to the problems Paul faced (I Cor. 1:10ff.), and says: "Take up the epistle of the blessed Paul the Apostle. . . . With true inspiration he charged you concerning himself and Cephas and Apollos, because even then you had made yourselves partisans. But that partisanship entailed less guilt on you; for you were partisans of Apostles of high reputation, and of a man approved by them. But now consider who they are who have perverted you, and have lessened the respect due to your famous love for the brethren. It is a shameful report, beloved, extremely shameful, and unworthy of your training in Christ . . ." (47:1, 3-6).

It is also noteworthy that the theological problem of the resurrection which Paul dealt with in I Corinthians 15 was not forever solved in Corinth, and, thus, Clement found it necessary to repeat instruction on this subject, too (I Clement 24-26).

²⁷Eric Lane Titus, Essentials of New Testament Study (New York: Ronald Press, 1958), p. 140. This is also the

to the Romans must have been very timely from another standpoint as well because the tension between Gentile Christianity and Judaistic Christianity--the most crucial first century problem which confronted the Church--is revealed by chapters 14 and 15 to have been very much present within the church of Rome when Paul wrote. By the time one reads through to the fifteenth chapter, it is not at all hard to understand at least something of the immediate situation at hand when Paul says:

May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 15:5-6).

What, exactly, was the nature of the strife within the church at Rome? It would seem that for one thing the Jewish Christians were not extending hospitality to Gentile Christians (15:7). The Gentile brethren did not observe the Sabbath Day, with all of its restrictions of the law (14:5). Also, they refused to follow the dietary regulations observed by the Jews, and ate any meat, whether it had been sacrificed to idols or not (14:2, 13-15, 20-21). Some

view of C. H. Dodd who states that "it was not any internal conditions in the church of Rome that called forth the letter, but the development of Paul's own plans" (Dodd, op. cit., p. xxv). The intent of this study, however, is not to show that internal conditions within the church called forth Paul's Epistle to the Romans, but rather that the Epistle does, nonetheless, yield considerable insight into what those internal conditions were.

of the Jews, on the other hand, refused to eat meat at all--perhaps because all that was available was "unclean"--and, thus, they would eat only vegetables (14:2). It seems evident, too, that the Gentiles ridiculed the Jews for their legalism (14:3, 10), and urged the Jews to forget their compunctions, and thus violate their conscience (14:20, 22). It also appears that each side maintained a very judgmental attitude toward the other (14:3-4, 13).

Concerning this section of 14:1-15:13, Sanday and Headlam stated that in their day

. . . all commentators seem to agree in assuming that the Apostle is dealing with certain special circumstances which have arisen in the Church of Rome, and that the weak and the strong represent two parties in that church.²⁸

But they went on to reject this view and said that

. . . as our examination of the Epistle has proceeded, it has become more and more clear that there is little or no special reference in the arguments. Both in the controversial portion and in the admonitory portion, we find constant reminiscences of earlier situations, but always with the sting of controversy gone.²⁹

But what would be more natural than to write without the "sting of controversy"?³⁰ Paul had not yet been to Rome

²⁸William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans (3d ed. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1897), pp. 399-400.

²⁹Ibid., p. 401.

³⁰There are two particular hints, though, which would indicate that the controversy in which Paul had been so deeply involved had not passed by this quickly and, thus,

to view the situation firsthand and was consequently not personally involved in the local strife. He was also doing his best not to meddle in a church which someone else had founded (15:20). Moreover, Paul's main purpose was to make friends and gain support for his proposed trip to Spain. Consequently, he could scarcely afford to become too deeply involved in Roman controversies. In fact, he speaks as boldly as he does in this section only because he considered himself to be the Apostle to the Gentiles (15:15-16), and the church at Rome was undoubtedly predominately Gentile.³¹

Thus, when Paul says, "Then let us no more pass judgment on one another . . ." (14:13), it certainly sounds like an admonition and exhortation about a specific

he was not simply reminiscing about a dead issue as Sanday and Headlam believed. First, the long delay in the general acceptance and collection of Paul's letters after his death would indicate a rather general rejection of Paul by his contemporaries. Second, assuming II Timothy to be pseudonymous yet containing genuine fragments of Paul's correspondence, the statement "At my first defense no one took my part; all deserted me. May it not be charged against them!" (II Tim. 4:16), may very well reflect a historical incident in Paul's Roman imprisonment (II Tim. 1:17). This possibility is strengthened by the statement of Clement that Paul's death was due to "jealousy and strife" (I Clement 5:5), and also the statement of Tacitus that vast numbers of Christians were convicted through the "disclosures" of other Christians (Tacitus, The Annals, XV.44, op. cit., IV, 284).

³¹Verses 1:5-6, 13; 11:13; and 15:15 all clearly point to predominately Gentile readers. Thus, A. M. Hunter concludes that "we need have no hesitation in the conclusion that the majority of the 'saints' in Rome to whom Paul wrote were Gentiles" [A. M. Hunter, The Epistle to the Romans (London: SCM Press, 1955), p. 14].

situation and not a mere generality. The same is true when he says, "Let us then pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding" (14:19). Certainly this does not sound like Paul is simply stating the ethical ramifications of his doctrine of justification by faith and its consequent freedom in Christ. Instead, specific strife and disharmony would clearly seem to lie behind such a statement.

The rhetorical questions which Paul asks throughout Romans would seem to reveal something of the division within the church, too. It is entirely possible that each question reflects a heated debate in which both positive and negative answers were firmly held. For example, Paul asks "What advantage has the Jew?" (3:1); and again, "What is the value of circumcision?" (3:1). These two questions may well have been the occasion for endless friction among the Roman Christians. No doubt some would answer, "None"; others would say, "Great advantage, indeed."³²

Division could have easily stemmed from points concerning which Paul asks further questions. "Then what becomes of our boasting?" (3:27). No doubt both sides were doing more than their share of boasting. "Do we then overthrow the law by this faith?" (3:31). "What shall we say about Abraham . . .?" (4:1). "Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?" (6:1). "Are we to sin because we

³² Minear, op. cit., p. 12.

are not under law but under grace?" (6:15). "I ask, then, has God rejected his people?" (11:1).

There are other questions which Paul asks, but these are sufficient to illustrate, as Minear points out, just "how deep and difficult were chasms between one group of Roman believers and another. . . . All these questions reveal agonizing hostilities within the churches [Roman congregations], and poignant need for reconciliation."³³

Paul had no desire to build on another man's foundation (15:20), yet it is obvious that he could scarcely restrain himself at points. In fact, he implies as much when he says, "But on some points I have written to you very boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given me by God . . ." (15:15). Also, in such exhortations as these, Paul is certainly not just setting forth a systematic presentation of his beliefs, doctrines, or gospel:

I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind . . ." (12:1-2).

For by the grace given to me I bid everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think . . ." (12:3).

Paul does not take sides, and he spares neither group when he points out that ". . . there is no distinction [between the Jew or Gentile]; since all have sinned and fall

³³Ibid., pp. 12-13.

short of the glory of God . . ." (3:23). Although his largest measure of "corrective advice" seems to be for the Jewish Christians, it is evident that his heart went out in love to these brethren for whom the Law was an apparent "stumbling block," keeping them from realizing their full potential of freedom in Christ Jesus:

I am speaking the truth in Christ, I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen by race (9:1-3).

But Paul is hardest on the Gentiles and warns them against being too inconsiderate, overbearing and intolerant in their attitude toward Jewish distinctions of days and meats. The Gentiles had evidently been boasting of their freedom, and Paul found it necessary to curb their vaunted liberalism:

Now I am speaking to you Gentiles . . . if some of the branches were broken off, and you, a wild olive shoot, were grafted in their place to share the richness of the olive tree, do not boast over the branches. If you do boast, remember it is not you that support the root, but the root that supports you . . . so do not become proud, but stand in awe. For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you (11:13a, 17-18, 20b-21).

This, then, is a brief sketch of the conditions within the church at Rome about ten or fifteen years before Mark wrote and, as Minear points out, "we need not suppose that conditions had greatly changed when his Gospel was written."³⁴

³⁴Ibid., p. 14.

The Gospel of Mark is surely not intended primarily to heal any breach between the Jewish and Gentile Christians. But it seems possible that such a division does lie in the background, and that this Gospel, therefore, might well be addressed to this problem in a secondary sort of way. It is noteworthy that the author selects and records many traditions concerning Jesus which would speak particularly to any such barrier which the Law might raise between Jewish and Gentile Christians. Some of these stories seem to be included in an almost incidental way; yet their selection can hardly be accidental. For example, it must be by conscious design that the author chooses to use the traditions of Jesus healing the Syrophoenician's daughter (7:24-30), and the Gerasene demoniac (5:1-20), whom Sherman Johnson says "must be a Gentile" since "his restoration takes place in Gentile territory."³⁵

It is also interesting to note that several other incidents which the author records concern controversies centering about the Law. Once Jesus approved the actions of his disciples when they plucked grain and ate it on the sabbath (2:23-25), and he countered the charge of the Pharisees by saying, "The sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath" (2:27). On another occasion his healing on the

³⁵ Sherman E. Johnson, The Gospel According to St. Mark (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960), p. 100.

sabbath greatly angered the Pharisees (3:1-6), which anger may have been heightened because such healings on the sabbath occurred, no doubt, more than once.³⁶ Again, Jesus defended his disciples when they ate without properly washing their hands (7:1-8). And, finally, it is a Roman centurion who, in the end, recognized Jesus for who he really was: "Truly this man was the Son of God!" (15:41).

In view of these rather pointed incidents in which Jesus is pictured as being in conflict with Jewish authorities over matters of the Law, and of the place given the Gentiles in this Gospel, it seems highly probable that the Jewish-Gentile controversy in the Roman church was still going on in Mark's day.

Paul S. Minear suggests that the external problems which the Roman Christians faced may have contributed to some extent to their internal problems. Many must have felt that Paul's fate at the hands of the Romans discredited his message and his way of preaching it. Therefore, if the church was to succeed, it would necessarily have to remain at peace with the empire. Yet, there must have been those who considered these "careful saints" as "enemies of the cross of Christ" because they did not throw caution to the winds. Consequently, Minear concludes, "Can any guess be more certain than that these two groups must have found it

³⁶ Cf. Mark 1:21-26; Luke 13:10-17; 14:1-6.

hard to live together within the same brotherhood?"³⁷

III. PREDOMINANT THEOLOGICAL VIEWS IN ROME

Along with the anxieties, fears, and persecutions caused from political pressures without, and the dissension and divisions within the church, one needs also to have some understanding of the theological background of the Gospel of Mark. What were the predominant doctrinal beliefs in the church of Rome when Mark wrote? This is not an easy question to answer, but with the above factional differences brought to our attention, many of the doctrinal comparisons which can be made between Mark and Romans take on added significance. These can best be noted under separate groups: similarities and differences.

Doctrinal similarities. As might be expected, the views of Mark parallel those of Paul in many respects. For example, both agree that man's salvation and deliverance from sin comes only through Jesus Christ to those who believe (Romans 10:9; Mark 9:23),³⁸ and that there is consequently no place for human pride in moral achievement (Romans 1:1-13; Mark 10:17-27). The place of faith is central for both (Romans 1:16-17; 11:17-21; Mark 11:22).

³⁷Minear, op. cit., p. 15.

³⁸It is very difficult to point to one specific passage as an illustration of some theme of either author, and especially is this true in the case of Mark.

Salvation is for both Gentiles and Jews, although it was for the Jew first, and then to the Gentiles (Romans 1:16; Mark 7:26-29). Now, however, neither the Gentiles nor the Jews are superior to the other, and the only thing which counts is faith in Christ (Romans 10:9-12; Mark 9:37). Also, both place great importance upon the future: the Parousia is at hand (Romans 8:18-25; 13:11-14; Mark 9:1; 13:30).³⁹

These doctrinal similarities, however, are not peculiar to Paul and Mark. Instead, they are views which were a part of the earliest tradition current in the primitive church. Consequently, Mark is not dependent upon Paul for these views, nor is he lending support to "Paulinism" in Rome. Though widely held at one time, the view of Volkmar (1857) that Mark is a specifically "Pauline" Gospel has largely been abandoned in the light of Martin Werner's The Influence of Pauline Theology in the Gospel of Mark: A Study in New Testament Theology (1923). A. E. G. Rawlinson, who was of the opinion that Mark was a former companion and fellow worker of Paul, says that "it is really remarkable how little trace has been left either upon the

³⁹Although Paul does not elaborate his eschatological view in his Roman Epistle, he does seem to be speaking of the Parousia here. Moreover, though this study is in the main confined to his views set forth in Romans, it hardly seems possible that Mark, and the Roman church in general would not have been fully conversant with Paul's eschatological views since his influence in Rome was certainly not limited to this one Epistle.

vocabulary or upon the Gospel by any ideas or any doctrines which may rightly be described as distinctively Pauline."⁴⁰ Rawlinson also points out that if Mark is "Pauline," then "it is a 'Paulinism' such as S. Peter also would have endorsed"⁴¹ inasmuch as Paul claims that Peter was in principle on his side (Galatians 2:6ff.). This is also the very strong contention of F. C. Grant who states that "the alleged 'Paulinism' of Mark has undoubtedly been greatly exaggerated," and he further points out that "the agreements of Mark with Paul do not go beyond the views common to primitive Christianity."⁴²

The points of the earliest kerygma which Mark and Paul held in common are of particular importance for an understanding of the background of Mark in this respect: they show that Mark was not writing in defense of Paul or his ideas, and they serve somewhat to balance the Christological differences which we shall now turn to. In fact, the greater the importance placed on the Christological differences, then the greater the necessity for noting any doctrinal similarities.

⁴⁰A. E. J. Rawlinson, St. Mark (London: Methuen, 1925), p. xliv.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Frederick C. Grant, The Gospels: Their Origin and Their Growth (New York: Harper & Bros., 1957), p. 104.

Christological differences. In order to appreciate fully the picture of Jesus Christ presented in the Gospel of Mark, and its contrast with the current view of Christ in the Roman church as evidenced by Romans 1:1-4, one needs to have a rather thoroughgoing understanding of Paul's Christology as can be gleaned from his collective letters. To begin with, Paul thought of Christ as being the incarnation of Deity, and whose existence covered three distinct stages: (1) before his incarnation, (2) his earthly-historical life, and (3) his resurrection and final exaltation (Philippians 2:5-11).

But this is not at all the view of Mark. For one thing, as F. C. Grant points out, "it is not at all probable that Mark thought of Christ as pre-existent."⁴³ Mark has his own idea of where the gospel begins, and it is not back beyond the stage of history as it is for Paul and the Fourth Gospel. Instead, it begins at the baptism of Jesus by John. Mark states as much in the very "title" of his work when he says "Ἀρχὴ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ" (The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ), and then proceeds immediately with the story of John and Jesus. Of course, in keeping with the current kerygma, the coming of Jesus is a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies, but this is covered in

⁴³ Frederick C. Grant, The Earliest Gospel (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1943), p. 107.

two verses (1:2-3) and there can be no doubt that the good news does not really begin here--it begins with the earthly ministry of Jesus of Nazareth which, in turn, begins with his baptism.

This leads to a second very important difference besides the whole idea of pre-existence. The conception of the earthly life of Jesus is entirely different in Mark and in Paul. Mark was very much concerned with the historical Jesus. It is this fact, no doubt, which calls forth a wholly new and radically different type of literature. Mark is trying to show, for one thing, that Jesus was the Messiah even during his earthly life. But Paul was only secondarily concerned with the historical Jesus at the most. During the second (earthly) stage of being, pre-existent Deity liquidated all his assets, and then left them all behind--completely! Very fundamental to Paul's view of Jesus' earthly life was his concept that pre-existent Deity emptied himself ("ἐαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν", Philippians 2:7). Consequently, Paul can say,

From now, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once regarded Christ from a human point of view, we regard him thus no longer (II Corinthians 5:16).

In other words, the life of the historical Jesus was merely a brief interlude in the overall cosmic drama. Paul was chiefly concerned with the cosmic Christ--the pre-existent Son of God (Philippians 2:5-11), and with the cosmic

involvement of Christ and of the Christian in history (Colossians 1:15-20; II Corinthians 5:16-21; Romans 8:18-39).⁴⁴

This, in turn, brings on the third major point of difference: just when did Jesus become the Christ? In his opening greeting to the church at Rome, Paul sets forth a creedlike statement of the primitive faith which surely must have been a common starting point for both himself and the Christians at Rome:

. . . concerning his Son, he was descended from David according to the flesh and designated Son of God, in power according to the Spirit of Holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord . . . (Romans 1:3-4).

This is a part of the early kerygma which Paul no doubt received and expanded--surely his Christology goes far beyond this statement of faith. But the point is, he did share this much of the early doctrine with the Christians at Rome and--so he implies--with all Christians everywhere. For Paul, and evidently his readers in Rome, Jesus became Son of God, the Christ, by the power of the Spirit at the moment of his resurrection from the dead.

But Mark does not accept this at all; for Mark, Jesus was already the Messiah before his death and resurrection. In fact, he was the Messiah throughout his entire earthly

⁴⁴This is assuming that Colossians is Pauline, although scholars are by no means unanimous on this. For a full discussion of the authenticity of Colossians see Donald Guthrie, New Testament Introduction (Chicago: Inter-Varsity Press, 1961), pp. 167-171.

ministry; he became the Christ at the moment of his baptism, when the heavenly Voice had announced, "Thou art my Beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased" (1:11). In other words, for Paul, Jesus became the Christ at his resurrection; but for Mark, Jesus became the Messiah at his baptism.

With these three major points of Christological differences in view, then one can see a great many other differences. Grant points out that "Mark represents Jesus as repudiating the Davidic descent of the Messiah . . . while Paul insists upon the Davidic descent . . ." (Mark 12:35-37; Romans 1:3).⁴⁵

Also, the personal names and titles which Mark uses for Jesus is very revealing. The personal name "Jesus" occurs over eighty times, but "Jesus Christ" only once (1:1), and the names "Lord Jesus" and "Christ Jesus" are not used at all.⁴⁶ Paul, on the other hand, uses combinations of "Jesus Christ," "Lord Jesus Christ," and "Christ Jesus" constantly. The latter, however, is strictly Pauline.

Again, Mark has "κύριε" only once (7:28) where it almost certainly means "sir;" and "ὁ κύριος" also occurs just one time (11:3), and here it probably has no more significance than "master."

⁴⁵ Grant, The Earliest Gospel, p. 118.

⁴⁶ The name "Lord Jesus" is used one time, however, in the spurious ending (16:19).

The title "Son of Man" ("ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου") is used fourteen times exclusively by Jesus of himself in Mark as a personal messianic term. Paul, on the other hand, never uses the term "Son of Man" at all.

Furthermore, the title "Son of God," which Vincent Taylor says "represents the most fundamental element in Mark's Christology,"⁴⁷ is used five times in Mark and is surely meant three other times where simply "Son" is used.⁴⁸ Paul believed Christ Jesus to be the Son of God, too, but not during the earthly life of Jesus--he did not become the Son of God until the resurrection (Romans 1:2-4)!

Turning now to other specific differences, besides the first three noted and the names and titles used for Christ, it is noteworthy that Mark and Paul are also radically different in their views of the death of Christ. Although they both view his death as in some way effecting man's salvation, for Paul it would seem to be the only act of Christ during his earthly life that had any real messianic significance.⁴⁹ But even so, his death cannot stand

⁴⁷Vincent Taylor, The Gospel According to St. Mark (London: Macmillan, 1952), p. 120.

⁴⁸Mark 1:1; 3:11; 5:7; 14:61; 15:39; and 1:11; 9:7; 13:32.

⁴⁹Paul's statement in II Corinthians 5:18-19 is not at all in variance with this. As Floyd V. Filson makes clear, "Paul is not saying that God was in Christ. . . . He is making a statement about what God did. The word was should be taken with reconciling; as the RSV mg. says, in

alone; it becomes significant only in the light of the resurrection. It was for this purpose that he came--to die and be raised (I Corinthians 15:3-4; Romans 8:3; Galatians 4:4). But not so for Mark; Jesus' mission in Mark is to "destroy the works of the devil" (1:24), and forgiveness is not dependent upon his death because even during his lifetime he had power to forgive sins (2:10). The purpose of Jesus' death, accordingly, was "to give his life as a ransom for many" (10:45), and his blood was the "blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many" (14:24). Also, the death of Jesus was in accordance with the will of God (8:31), to which Jesus was voluntarily obedient.

Finally, there is a great difference between the concept of the resurrection in Paul and in Mark. Surely it had a place of great importance in the thinking of Mark, but it was not the thing which made Jesus the Christ. As has been pointed out, in Mark Jesus is the Christ from his baptism. And, as was also stated, there is no idea of the pre-existent Christ in Mark; the origin of Jesus was known to all--he was simply Jesus of Nazareth of Galilee, a carpenter (1:9; 6:3). But for Paul it was the resurrection which made Jesus the Christ. Consequently, for Paul the resurrection is everything.

Christ God was reconciling the world to himself" (Floyd V. Filson, "The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: Exegesis," The Interpreter's Bible, X, 340-341).

But there is another possible difference in their views of the resurrection, and this concerns their respective views of the "method" of the resurrection. For Paul it is strictly an act of God: God raised him up "ἐγείρω" (Romans 4:24; 6:4, 9; 7:4; 8:11; 10:9; cf. I Corinthians 15:14-16). But for Mark it does not seem to be a special act of divine intervention at all; instead, Jesus says that the Son of Man will rise up "ἀνίστημι" (Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:34). This difference, if it is a difference, is not due to Paul's use of "ἐγείρω" as being a theological development from a more primitive tradition, because as F. C. Grant suggests, "ἐγείρω" which Paul uses exclusively, is more primitive than "ἀνίστημι" which Mark uses.⁵⁰

Moreover, for Mark, Jesus' resurrection involves the empty tomb. Grant is of the opinion that for Mark, Jesus' "resurrection body was still his natural body, transmuted, transfigured, glorified."⁵¹ Such a view would have been totally repugnant, and repudiated by Paul, for his resurrection "body" would still be "σάρξ" (flesh) and not

⁵⁰ Grant, The Earliest Gospel, p. 66. There is possibly a fatal blow to any supposed distinction between Paul's view of the "method" of the resurrection and that of Mark. This lies in the fact that whereas the Gospel is consistent in reporting Jesus' predictions that the Son of man "will rise up" (ἀνίστημι) in 8:31; 9:31; and 10:34, the young man at the tomb announces to the women, "He has been raised" (ἡγέρθη) in 16:6.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 201.

"πνεῦμα" (spirit). This is the whole force of Paul's argument in I Corinthians 15; here a spiritual, resurrection body replaces the earthly, fleshly body. Thus for Paul, the empty tomb is not in the least essential to the doctrine of the resurrection of Christ. On the other hand, Mark does not share Paul's abhorrence of "σάρξ" and, as Grant points out, "he can think of the transfiguration of Christ's earthly body . . . without the least question of the continuity of Christ's physical body" (Mark 9:2-3).⁵²

Frederick C. Grant refers to the great work which Paul Werner did in this area and says that Werner concluded that on every point the distinctively Pauline doctrines of the Law, gospel, sin, flesh and spirit, faith, sacramental teaching, and eschatology are absolutely not to be found in Mark, "and that their agreements nowhere go beyond the common basis of non-Pauline Gentile Christianity."⁵³ In fact, Grant continues, in their major outlines the two Christologies are totally incompatible. He then quotes Werner as follows:

For Mark, a man becomes Messiah. For Paul, the Messiah becomes (temporarily) a man. For Mark, the Messiahship is sketched out in the picture of a human life; for Paul, the human life is an episode in the history of a heavenly, messianic being. To put it in a formula, which of course may be pressed too far, the miracle for Mark, is the deification of Jesus; for Paul

⁵² Ibid., p. 202.

⁵³ Ibid., pp. 202-203.

it is the incarnation. That is to say, Mark's Christology is at its basis entirely different from Paul's.⁵⁴

The whole point and purpose of this theological background has been to show that the Christology of Mark was radically different from that of Paul, and that in all probability the Christology of Paul--at least in embryonic form--was the predominant Christology in the church at Rome. At least Paul and the church could certainly agree on this one point: that Jesus became the Messiah in power at the time of his resurrection (Romans 1:3-4). Consequently, in the Roman church the prevailing view of the historical life of Jesus could well be expected to be closer to that of Paul than of Mark. This, then, becomes another possible purpose which Mark had in mind--to set straight in the minds of his readers the role of the historical Jesus and, thus, to "correct" the lingering influence of Paul's Christological doctrines.

⁵⁴Paul Werner, The Influence of Pauline Theology in the Gospel of Mark: A Study in New Testament Theology, pp. 49-50, cited in Grant, The Earliest Gospel, pp. 197-198.

CHAPTER III

THE MESSIANIC SECRET

I. THE HUMANITY OF JESUS

It is very obvious that the Jesus of Mark is much more "human" than in either of the other two Synoptics. While his disciples respect him, their words to Jesus in the Gospel of Mark are much more stern than in either Matthew or Luke. For example, in Mark the disciples question, "Teacher, do you not care if we perish?" (4:38); but in Matthew they cry, "Save, Lord; we are perishing" (8:25), and in Luke their exclamation is, "Master, Master, we are perishing!" (8:24).

Also, Jesus showed very human traits when "he looked around at them [the Pharisees] with anger . . ." (3:5), and when he became indignant at Peter at the time of Peter's rebuke (8:33). He simply could not understand the unbelief of the people of his own community (6:1, 6), which led him to say, "A prophet is not without honor, except in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house" (6:4). But this was putting it mildly; at one time his family thought he was insane (3:21, 31-32)! To say the least, he was certainly not being treated like anyone very special.

When the Pharisees sought a sign there were indications of spiritual fatigue because Jesus "sighed deeply in

his spirit . . ." (8:12). Mark says that in Gethsemane Jesus "began to be greatly distressed and troubled" (14:33); but Matthew softens this considerably by saying that "he began to be sorrowful and troubled" (26:37), and Luke omits it altogether. And there is the terrible cry of dereliction--"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (15:34); this Matthew retains, but Luke rejects it.

There are further examples of Jesus being placed a little more on the ordinary human level in Mark than in the other Gospels. Mark says that "he could do no mighty works" in his own country (6:5), but Matthew changes this to say that "he did not do many mighty works there" (13:58). Again, Mark records Jesus as saying, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone" (10:18). Matthew changes this to read, "Why do you ask me about what is good?" (19:17). Also, in Mark, the disciples' pre-Resurrection mode of addressing Jesus as "Teacher" or "Rabbi" is faithfully reflected throughout,¹ whereas Matthew and Luke usually represent him as being addressed by the title "Lord," thus reflecting the post-Resurrection usage of the church.

Another statement of Mark which the other two Synoptics certainly do not let stand is where Jesus says,

¹In Mark "Rabbi" is used of Jesus four times, and "Teacher" is used twelve times.

"Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me; and whoever receives me, receives not me but him that sent me" (9:37).² This last phrase, ". . . receives not me but him that sent me," is omitted by both Matthew (10:40) and Luke (10:16).

Thus it is obvious that Mark is exceptionally candid in his picture of the historical Jesus. Certainly Jesus is far from being the omniscient Christ portrayed in the Fourth Gospel. He looked with paternal love on the man who sought eternal life (10:21); in fact, Jesus is frequently made to appear and act just like any other man. Even to his family and his kinsmen--those who knew him best--his identity was objectively quite uncertain. With hindsight one is almost astonished to learn that at one time and place the people "began to beg Jesus to depart from their neighborhood" (5:17)!

After viewing such a picture of Jesus as this, one cannot be surprised to find the disciples pictured in a rather unfavorable light throughout. For example, the bold request of James and John that each be permitted to sit at the side of Jesus in his glory (10:37), is changed by Matthew to a request made by their mother (20:21). Also, the account of the disciples' failure to watch with Jesus in Gethsemane is considerably softened in Luke. Mark has

²The underlining is added.

And he came and found them sleeping, and he said to Peter, "Simon, are you asleep? Could you not watch one hour?" (14:37).

But Luke records,

. . . and he said to them, "Why do you sleep? Rise and pray that you may not enter into temptation" (22:46).

And again, the words and curse of Peter in denying Jesus are much more offensive in Mark than in Luke:

But he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, "I do not know this man of whom you speak." And immediately the cock crowed a second time (Mark 14:71-72a).

But Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are saying." And immediately, while he was still speaking, the cock crowed (Luke 22:60).

Finally, Jesus' rebuke to Peter in Caesarea Philippi (8:33) is omitted by Luke and considerably weakened by Matthew by the addition of "You are a hindrance to me . . ." (16:23).

Thus, it is clear that Mark stands alone in presenting the historical Jesus as being so "human," and in leaving his identity a mystery. As Wayne G. Rollins asserts, "Where Mark leaves Jesus' identity in a state of objective uncertainty, Matthew and Luke frequently rush in with coddling revisions."³

³Wayne G. Rollins, The Gospels: Portraits of Christ (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963), p. 30.

II. THE HIDDEN MESSIAH

Not only does Mark present a very "human" picture of Jesus, there is another important Marcan theme which contributes to the objective uncertainty of Jesus' identity. This is the fact that Jesus suppresses any information about himself. Gradually, however, the secret unfolds until everyone involved knows his identity. This unfolding of the messianic secret has been characterized by Curtis Beach as "the six-stage revelation of Jesus' messiahship."⁴ The first disclosure is to Jesus himself; secondly, to the demons; thirdly, to Peter--but all the other disciples are immediately in on the secret, too;⁵ fourthly, to the "inner core" of disciples at the Transfiguration; fifthly, to the Sanhedrin; and sixthly, to the Roman centurion. This is a fairly accurate observation and, with just a few changes, is the basic outline which will here be followed.

⁴Curtis Beach, The Gospel of Mark (Harper & Brothers, 1959), p. 46.

⁵Beach reserves this revelation for Peter alone, and makes the next one at the Transfiguration the general revelation for all the disciples (Ibid., pp. 47, 89). However, this seems to be twisting the text to fit a preconceived idea that this is the experience of the early church read back into the life of Jesus, for Beach states: "The point of the story is that this was a revelation to Peter, not to the disciples as a whole. To be sure, the disciples have overheard Peter's statement, but it is his affirmation, not theirs. Disclosure to the rest of the disciples will come later, at the Transfiguration" (Ibid., p. 89). But one must not read anything into the text. It must be noted that first of all, the disclosure at the Transfiguration is

The disclosure to Jesus. To begin with, Jesus alone knows his true identity. In the first chapter, at his baptism, when Jesus came up out of the water the heavens opened and he saw the Spirit descending upon him like a dove, and he heard the voice which said, "Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased" (1:10-11). It is important to note that no one else sees the heavens open or the Spirit descend, and no one else hears the voice. This is a secret which Jesus alone knows.

The demons recognize him. As the reader proceeds through the Gospels, he learns that the exorcized demons recognize who Jesus is, but he commands them to keep silent and not divulge this information:

And he healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him (1:34).

And whenever the unclean spirits beheld him, they fell down before him and cried out, 'You are the Son of God.' And he strictly ordered them not to make him known (3:11-12).

clearly not to all the disciples--only three are present. Secondly, the reading of the text makes it clear that at the point of the great confession Peter is to be understood as acting as spokesman for the group rather than for himself individually: Jesus questions them, he charged them to tell no one, he began to teach them many things. If at any point Peter is acting individually, then it is when he rebukes Jesus, and Jesus' rebuke in return is meant for Peter alone. Finally, it would appear that to hold Beach's view means that not only did the author of Mark carefully structure his work, but that we are, in turn, to place our own structure on Mark's.

His mighty works must be kept quiet. Next, one finds Jesus commanding those whom he healed to be quiet about his miracles. Although there is no indication of recognition on their part of who he is, he evidently did not want crowds to be drawn to him through rumors of miracles, and as a result be acclaimed the Messiah because of his mighty works. The first such miracle, followed by a command to silence, is of a leper. Mark records that after healing him Jesus ". . . sternly charged him, and sent him away at once, and said to him, 'See that you say nothing to anyone . . .'" (1:43). The next miracle was the restoration of life to the twelve year old daughter of the ruler of the synagogue. Speaking of the people who were standing about, the Gospel states: "And immediately they were overcome with amazement. And he strictly charged them that no one should know this" (5:42-43). The next was the healing of a deaf and dumb man in the region of the Decapolis. After this miracle the author says, "And he charged them to tell no one; but the more he charged them, the more zealously they proclaimed it" (7:36).

The final incident is undoubtedly a charge to silence also, although it is certainly not as specific as the foregoing examples. Here a blind man was healed by Jesus, and after the man saw everything clearly, Jesus ". . . sent him away to his home, saying 'Do not even enter the village'" (8:26).

Signs are refused. There are further examples of another type of suppression of information about who Jesus was and of the miracles he performed. When the Pharisees came seeking a sign he refused saying, "Why does this generation seek a sign? Truly, I say to you, no sign shall be given to this generation" (8:12).

Parables contribute to the secret. Next, one is somewhat amazed to learn that, according to Mark, even the parables are designed as a pedagogical device to keep the opposition in darkness, yet at the same time enlighten Jesus' followers:

And he said to them, 'To you has been given the secret of the Kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables; so that they may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand; thus they should turn again, and be forgiven' (4:11-12).

With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; he did not speak to them without a parable, but privately to his own disciples he explained everything (4:33-34).

Hearts are hardened. Mark obviously shares the current theological opinion of his day that God himself had his hand in the deception of the Jews, and had hardened their hearts.⁶ This is evidenced by his statement about the purpose of his parables, as well as by his statements about the Jews' hearts being hardened (3:5; 7:6-7). But it was not the Jews alone; even the hearts of his disciples were

⁶See Romans 11:25.

hardened. After feeding the multitude, and getting into the boat with his disciples, we read that ". . . they were utterly astounded, for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened" (6:51-52). Later, Jesus asks, "Why do you discuss the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened?" (8:17).

The disciples finally learn. Furthermore, there is no attempt to hide the fact that even his disciples were blind to much that Jesus said and did during his earthly ministry. After Jesus calmed the storm, the disciples were filled with amazement and questioned among themselves, "Who then is this, that even wind and sea obey him?" (4:41). On another occasion, when the woman with the hemorrhage secretly touched his garment, and Jesus perceived that healing power had gone forth from himself and questioned who it was who had touched him, his disciples said: "You see the crowd pressing around you, and yet you say, 'Who touched me?'" (5:31).

This leads to the next phase of the unfolding of the messianic secret and which is also the turning point of Mark's Gospel. Somewhere among the villages of Caesarea Philippi Jesus asked his disciples who men thought that he was, and they answered,

'John the Baptist; and others say Elijah; and others one of the prophets.' And he asked them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Peter answered him, 'You are the

Christ.' And he charged them to tell no one about him (8:28-30).

The first thing to be noted here is that Jesus does not deny that he is the Christ. Instead, one finds the familiar reaction which one has already come to expect: "He charged them to tell no one about him."

Whether this statement on the part of Peter was the result of a sudden burst of insight or whether it was the culmination of a growing conviction which the disciples had, Mark does not say. Matthew attributes it to a revelation from God (16:17). But one does learn, however, that their new "insight" is only partial. Although they have the right name, they do not have the right concept at all. When Jesus proceeds to explain exactly what it means to be the Christ, his explanation is at once rejected by the disciples and he consequently rebukes Peter--not for misunderstanding, but for rejecting his explanation (8:33).

The next revelatory incident occurs on a mountain to the "inner core" of disciples: Peter, James and John. Here Jesus was transfigured before their very eyes, and a voice spoke to them out of the cloud, saying, "This is my beloved Son; listen to him" (9:7). Again, however, the charge to silence is repeated. But this time there is a time limit placed on the secret: they are to keep this to themselves until after the "Son of man should have risen from the dead" (9:9).

In spite of the dramatic incidents of Caesarea Philippi and the "mount of transfiguration," the disciples still lack understanding. After receiving their last charge to silence, on their way down the mountain, the evangelist says that "they kept the matter to themselves, questioning what the rising from the dead meant" (9:10). Again their ignorance is revealed: as they were passing through Galilee, Jesus taught them, saying: "The Son of Man will be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him; and when he is killed, after three days he will rise" (10:31). Yet, the disciples "did not understand the saying, and they were afraid to ask him" (10:32).

It is interesting to note in passing that after it finally dawns upon the disciples that Jesus is the Christ and they are "in" on the secret--although they do not understand the role or function of the Messiah--there are no further charges to silence. And it is not because there are no occasions similar to those where the charges were previously made. In 9:14-27 there is an account of an epileptic boy being healed; and in 10:46-52 there is the healing of Bartimaeus, the blind beggar. But to Bartimaeus Jesus simply says, "Go your way, your faith has made you well" (10:52). In the other incident, though, no parting remark is recorded at all.

The Jews are told. The revelations are not concluded, however; the next one is to the Jews. After being taken

in Gethsemane and brought before the Sanhedrin, the high priest asks Jesus, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" (14:61); and Jesus replies, "I am . . ." (14:62). This became the "final straw," and immediately "they all condemned him as deserving death" (14:64).

A Gentile discovers the secret. Finally, the last revelation comes at the most dramatic moment of all. At the very instant that Jesus breathed his last breath, the Roman centurion exclaimed: "Truly this man was the Son of God!" (15:39).

Sight without insight. This progressive unfolding of the secret might be summarized in a slightly different way from Beach's six-stage revelation: it is to Jesus, to the demons, to believers, to the Jews, and to Gentiles. It was also noted that several things contribute to the secret aside from Jesus' commands to silence when his true identity is recognized. His mighty works are to go unreported, for after many miracles people are commanded to remain quiet about what he has done. The parables, too, are a part of the secret; they are given only to keep his messiahship shrouded in mystery. Finally, even God himself contributes to the secret by keeping the hearts of the Jews hardened.

This leads to Mark's doctrine of "πώρωσις" (hardening). Paul had placed great emphasis upon the "hardening" of the Jews' hearts, too, but his view (Romans 11:13-32), as Bacon notes, was that this was God's way of "securing the

dissemination of the gospel among the Gentiles."⁷ In the Gospel of Mark, however, the concept of the "hardening" (4:11-12; 9:14-29) is entirely different. As Grant explains, "it was not an act of judgment . . . but of abandonment."⁸ This explains why the Pharisees could not recognize Jesus for who he was, even in spite of his parables and mighty works. There was sight, but no insight.

III. THE ROLE OF THE MESSIAH

After tracing the progressive revelations of just who Jesus is in the Gospel of Mark, it would perhaps appear that one should be ready to interpret the facts. But not so. The messianic secret is a "two-sided coin," and it is this other side which is really the most important. Yes, there is a growing understanding of the fact that Jesus of Nazareth is actually the Christ. But when do they ever really understand what the role or function of the Messiah is? They never do--not even the disciples--until after the resurrection!

The blindness of the disciples at this point is really twofold: they do not understand the necessity of the Messiah's sufferings, and they do not understand their own

⁷ Benjamin W. Bacon, Is Mark a Roman Gospel? (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1919), p. 81.

⁸ Frederick C. Grant, "The Gospel According to St. Mark: Exegesis," The Interpreter's Bible, VII, 700.

role in the community. Their misunderstanding is emphasized by the fact that both the second and third predictions by Jesus of his death are followed by stories of the disciples' concern about their importance and rank in the kingdom (9:33-37; 10:35-45). This question could only come up if they were thinking in terms of a royal Messiah.

Vincent Taylor explains that the sole purpose for Jesus imposing silence about who he was, was "because of the nature of Messiahship as He conceived it to be. To Him it was not primarily a matter of status but of action."⁹ This is clear as Jesus explains his role immediately following Peter's confession in Caesarea Philippi:

And he began to teach them that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. And he said this plainly (8:31-32a).

In other words, messiahship is not being someone, but doing something. More than anything else, it is a destiny. Paradoxically, Jesus was the Messiah already, yet he would not be the Messiah until his destiny was fulfilled.¹⁰

The disciples, however, have no historical basis for understanding this teaching, and they consequently reject it. The idea that the Messiah was to suffer was the exact

⁹Vincent Taylor, The Gospel According to St. Mark (London: Macmillan, 1952), p. 123.

¹⁰Ibid.

opposite of Jewish expectations, and the concept of the Son of man being resurrected was equally foreign.

It is noteworthy that the disciples are still in the dark after the transfiguration, for when they are commanded to keep quiet about this incident until after the resurrection, they questioned each other about "what the rising from the dead meant" (9:10).

A third time Jesus spells out his mission to his disciples, but again there is absolutely no evidence of understanding on their part:

And they were on the road, going up to Jerusalem. . . . And taking the twelve again, he began to tell them what was to happen to him, saying, 'Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man will be delivered to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death, and deliver him to the Gentiles; and they will mock him, and spit upon him, and scourge him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise (10:32a, 32d-34).

But even to the very end there is no indication of any real understanding on the part of the disciples of what is going on. While Jesus is praying in Gethsemane they all fall asleep (14:37, 40, 41), and when he is seized by the soldiers they all forsake him (14:50). Peter alone ventures to follow at a distance (14:54), but as soon as he is in a compromising position he denies that he even knew Jesus at all (15:71).

Finally, when the women go to the tomb, it is to anoint Jesus' body (16:1), and they are utterly amazed to find that the tomb is empty (16:5). Moreover, instead of

being filled with joy at the announcement by the young man that "He has risen" (16:6), they are filled with trembling and astonishment and fear (16:8).

The very fact that the disciples were not present that morning, but were sent a message by the women, clearly indicates that they still had not understood Jesus' teachings concerning the role of the Messiah, and especially what it meant for the Son of man to rise again.

Perhaps the abrupt ending of Mark accounts for the fact that more has not been made of the role of the Messiah as being a part of the messianic secret. In a way it looks as if the story of the role were not fully completed since there are no resurrection appearances. Benjamin Bacon was of the opinion that the abrupt ending of Mark was not an accident; instead, it was deliberately removed.

It has disappeared from Mark because something else was preferred. The change which begins in Mark and from it passes on to Matthew and Luke is nothing less than a revolt from the apostolic resurrection-gospel reported in I Cor. 15:1-11, whose primary manifestation is 'to Peter'. . . . In place of this common narrative proclaimed by all (verse 11) in Paul's time, Mark has 'another gospel,' of which not one hint or trace appears in Paul.¹¹

But a fuller ending is not really necessary. The mere facts that the tomb is empty and that the young man announces that "He has risen" (16:6) are sufficient. The resurrection does not make Jesus the Christ; it only

¹¹Bacon, op. cit., p. 77.

confirms his Messiahship. He had been the Christ from the moment of his baptism, yet paradoxically, he had to complete the role by being killed to be the Christ. Consequently, Mark has brought his story up to the point where Paul's gospel began--the resurrection--and from this point the rest of the good news is well known by everyone in Rome. There is no need for Mark to carry his story any further.

IV. SIGNS AND SYMBOLS FOR THE READER

A very interesting point is the fact that in spite of the messianic secret and Jesus' commands to silence, and of his refusal to give signs to the Pharisees (8:12), there are signs literally set up all over the place for the reader. Also, Mark does everything to call attention to these signs except wave flags and ring bells! For example:

But when you see the desolating sacrilege set up where it ought not to be (let the reader understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains (13:14).

To begin with there is John the Baptist described as being clothed "with camel's hair, and had a leather girdle around his waist" (1:6). This should immediately bring to the mind of the reader the image of Elijah who "wore a garment of haircloth, with a girdle of leather about his loins" (II Kings 1:8). Mark's connection of the Baptizer with Elijah is no doubt based upon Malachi's prediction (4:5-6) that the Messiah would be preceded by a new Elijah.

Next there is the allusion to the exodus from Egypt in the feeding of the multitudes of five and four thousand by Jesus in the "wilderness"--away from the villages where they might buy food. This is no doubt a parallel to God's feeding the Israelites in their wilderness wanderings.

Perhaps a more obscure allusion to an Old Testament event is the story of Jesus walking on the water. He tells his disciples, "Take heart, it is I" (6:50). "It is I" is literally "I am" (ἐγώ εἰμι). This reminds one of the words of Yahweh to Moses: "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you'" (Exodus 3:14). This same expression is given again by Jesus as he stands before the high priest during his trial. When asked by the high priest if he were the Son of the Blessed, Jesus replies, "ἐγώ εἰμι" (14:62).

An entirely different type of symbol is the typological one where the feeding of the Israelites in the wilderness is related to the two feedings of the multitudes in the "wilderness" by Jesus. Here Mark adds a third typological link--one which points to the future: the feeding of the Israelites in the wilderness equals the feeding of the five and four thousand by Jesus which, in turn, equals the feeding of the faithful through the eucharist in the wilderness of Rome.¹² It is noteworthy that Mark's description of the feeding of the multitude is very much like Paul's rendition

¹²Rollins, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

of the words of institution:

. . . and he took the seven loaves, and having given thanks he broke them and gave them to his disciples to set before the people . . . (8:6).

. . . the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is broken for you" (I Corinthians 11:23-24).

In further explanation of this symbolism Rollins says,

The allusion to the "one loaf with them in the boat" (Mark 8:14) and to the imminent death of Jesus farther on in the context (v. 31) may well be Mark's inventive means of completing the liturgical formulation found in Paul. Jesus is the loaf whose body will be broken in their behalf.¹³

There is number symbolism used in Mark, too, particularly in the two feedings of the multitudes. In the first, 5,000 people were fed and 12 baskets of crumbs remained; in the second 4,000 people were fed and 7 baskets of crumbs were left over. Rollins suggests that for Mark's Hellenistic readers, under the influence of Pythagoreanism, the numbers 5, 12, 4, and 7 have special meaning. The numbers 5 and 12 were strictly Jewish, representing the five books of the Torah and the twelve tribes of Israel. The numbers 4 and 7 are typically Hellenistic, representing the four winds or four passions, and the number 7 was especially cherished by the Pythagoreans.¹⁴ The following clearly suggests that Mark expected these numbers to have special symbolic value for his readers:

¹³ Ibid., p. 41.

¹⁴ Ibid.

"When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up?" They said to him, "Twelve." "And the seven for the four thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up?" And they said to him, "Seven." And he said to them, "Do you not yet understand?" (8:19-20).

Two final kinds of symbolism are those contained in names and words. For example, the name Bethphage (11:1) occurs in the context of the story of Jesus cursing the fig tree because it was barren. It can hardly be accidental that Bethphage means "house of unripe figs." Again, the name Barabbas means "son of the Father." Paradoxically, the "son of the Father" was freed while the true "Barabbas" was crucified.

The most significant word symbol is "τὴν ὁδόν" (the way, the road, the journey). Throughout the book of Acts "τὴν ὁδόν" is used to describe the Christian movement (9:2; 19:23; 22:4, 14, 22). Mark uses the term when he speaks of seed falling along the way (4:4, 15), when John the Baptist comes preparing the way (1:2-3), and when Jesus charges his disciples to take nothing along the way (6:8). Another use clearly refers to the problem of suffering when Mark refers to the way which leads to Jerusalem (10:32).

All of this shows the work of a master literary artist. In the light of all these signs and symbols, it is quite evident that Mark was one who could use such a thing as the messianic secret most skillfully. And indeed he did.

CHAPTER IV

A PROPOSED SOLUTION TO THE MESSIANIC SECRET

I. CURRENT SOLUTIONS

Ezra P. Gould's work on Mark (1896) is perhaps the oldest in current usage today. He believed that Mark presents Jesus as "a herald of the kingdom of God, a teacher, a prophet, a miracle-worker."¹ But it was in his role of prophet that Jesus wanted most of all to be recognized. Therefore, he "represses and deprecated the impetuous desire of the multitude to emphasize the miracle-worker rather than the prophet."² As time went on, Jesus had to contend with sudden and superficial popularity, hence, the commands to be quiet about him. But this is about as close as Gould comes to dealing with any "messianic secret."

Wilhelm Wrede was really the first to significantly wrestle with the problem of the messianic secret. His book, published in 1901, is still the starting point for any dealings with this subject.³ Wrede set forth the view that Jesus had not made any messianic claims; yet the early

¹Ezra P. Gould, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Mark (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1907), p. xx.

²Ibid.

³Wilhelm Wrede, Das Messiasgeheimnis in den Evangelien (3. Aufl. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1963).

Christians wanted to ascribe messianic claims to him. Therefore, the messianic secret was a device to represent secret claims on the part of Jesus. This, in turn, becomes the central theme of Mark. Vincent Taylor writes that "in the form in which Wrede presented it, the theory has been widely rejected, but it continues to exert a great influence, and therefore calls for reconsideration in a modern commentary."⁴

Taylor feels that it is most remarkable that even in the face of the many powerful arguments which have been presented against Wrede's theory, it has nonetheless continued to hold a place of historical and theological importance. This, he concludes, is simply because the messianic secret is inherent in the Gospel and lies behind almost every narrative in Mark. The answer to the problems posed by the messianic secret lies, then, in this very fact: "it is not a hypothesis imposed on the records from without, but an element integral to the tradition itself. Jesus imposed silence because of the nature of Messiahship as He conceived it to be."⁵

A very similar position is that of C. E. Cranfield. Cranfield does not think that the messianic secret was just

⁴Vincent Taylor, The Gospel According to St. Mark (London: Macmillan, 1952), p. 122.

⁵Ibid., p. 123.

a literary device of the author to explain the rejection of Jesus. His hiddenness was "an integral part of the history," and "was necessary for the fulfilment of Jesus' mission."⁶ Without the messianic secret, man would not "be allowed sufficient room in which to make a personal decision."⁷

Sherman Johnson, however, takes the position that the secret was at least to some extent imposed on his sources by the author of Mark in order to help early Christians explain why Jesus was rejected.⁸ This approximates the thinking of Martin Dibelius who says that the major factor underlying the choice of material in Mark is the conflict with the Jews. The messianic secret, then, serves to "explain why His own people finally sent Him to the cross."⁹

Another possibility is the idea set forth by F. C. Grant. He is of the opinion that the primary purpose of Mark "is to strengthen the faith and courage of his readers

⁶C. E. Cranfield, "Gospel of Mark," The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, III, 273-274.

⁷Ibid., p. 273.

⁸Sherman Johnson, "Christ," The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, I, 565. See also Sherman Johnson, "Messianic Secret," The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, IV, 261.

⁹Martin Dibelius, A Fresh Approach to the New Testament and Early Christian Literature (London: Ivor Nicholson and Watson, 1937), p. 58.

facing martyrdom,"¹⁰ and that the messianic secret is an attempt to solve the puzzle of Jesus' Messiahship in a new and higher sense than the Messiah had previously been thought of. Jesus "was the Christian Messiah, not the Jewish--and yet the two were related, in fact, identical."¹¹

R. H. Lightfoot believes that "the theme of St. Mark's gospel is that of the crucified Messiah;"¹² yet, "a crucified Messiah was a contradiction in terms."¹³ Consequently, "the full nature of the tragedy and of its paradox is only very gradually revealed."¹⁴

According to Harold A. Guy, the Gospel of Mark as we have it is the result of both a compiler and an editor, and there are no subtle plots or themes to be seen in the book. It was simply the intention of the compiler "to produce a statement of the 'traditions' or 'deliverances' of the preachers;"¹⁵ he had no axe to grind, and his outlook was certainly not Pauline. The editor, however, did insert material which paralleled Paul's thought in many respects,

¹⁰Frederick C. Grant, "The Gospel According to St. Mark: Introduction," The Interpreter's Bible, VII, 644.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Robert Henry Lightfoot, The Gospel Message of St. Mark (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1950), p. 36.

¹³Ibid., p. 35.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 36.

¹⁵Harold A. Guy, The Origin of the Gospel of Mark (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1955), p. 164.

but his final product is certainly no simple exposition of Paulinism.¹⁶

A somewhat similar view to this is that of Paul S. Minear. Minear states that the message of Mark had been preached many times by the author and others before it was put into writing. But "by gathering their mutual memories into a single, consecutive recital, he would remind himself and them of the basic Covenant into which they had entered. They had heard the word before, but they needed to listen again," because it had great "relevance to the varied opportunities and obstacles faced by servants of Christ in Nero's Rome."¹⁷

Yet another idea is that of Harvey Branscomb. He maintains that Mark supplies information on too many points to be reduced to a single theme. Also, he does not think that the Gospel was written to present certain doctrines or beliefs. Instead, Mark is simply telling "the Christian story as it was known and believed in the churches of the Hellenistic world a generation after Jesus' death."¹⁸

Another scholar who sees several important themes in Mark is D. E. Nineham. He points out that none of the

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 165-169.

¹⁷ Paul S. Minear, The Gospel According to Mark (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1962), p. 25.

¹⁸ B. Harvey Branscomb, The Gospel of Mark (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1937), xxii.

many solutions offered have met with really widespread acceptance, and suggests that it is entirely possible that "scholars are looking for something that is not there and attributing to the Evangelist a higher degree of self-conscious purpose than he in fact possessed."¹⁹ This is the view of H. J. Cadbury, who says that the evangelist "does not betray any subjectiveness of his own."²⁰ Nineham believes that Cadbury's view is an oversimplification, but he thinks it does serve as a corrective to the preponderance of opposite extremes.²¹

Nineham believes that Mark has no single overriding purpose; there are, instead, several beliefs and attitudes which seemed particularly vital in the situation in which the evangelist wrote. First, "he strives to show . . . the true character of the quarrel between Jesus and the Jewish authorities . . . and to present Jesus as innocent of any charge except . . . that he claimed to be the Messiah."²² A corollary point is that the author "seeks to show that it is often God's way to produce great and glorious results from inconspicuous and unpromising beginnings."²³

¹⁹D. E. Nineham, The Gospel of Saint Mark (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1963), p. 29.

²⁰Henry J. Cadbury, The Making of Luke-Acts (New York: Macmillan, 1927), p. 79.

²¹Nineham, op. cit., p. 29.

²²Ibid., p. 31.

²³Ibid.

Secondly, Nineham believes that the questions had been raised as to why Jesus had not claimed the messianic title earlier and more outspokenly, and why his Messiahship had not been "more fully and enthusiastically recognized during his earthly life, at any rate by his disciples?"²⁴ Mark presents a twofold answer: it was Jesus' deliberate intent to keep his Messiahship secret, at least until his very closing days; and too, everybody--including his disciples--"had displayed an almost incredible obtuseness with regard to what they heard and saw."²⁵

A third concern of Mark which Nineham sees were the persecutions and suffering which the Christians were then undergoing. Mark, then, was designed to strengthen and encourage them by pointing out that "nothing was happening to them which lay outside the providence of God or the predictions of their Master."²⁶

There are still other themes which Nineham sees in Mark. Particularly he believes that the author saw Jesus "as God's agent sent to begin the great final battle against the powers of evil."²⁷ He also endorses the statement of John Knox that "one of the principal purposes of this Gospel was to make clear the messianic significance of Jesus' whole career, from the baptism on, as over against an earlier

²⁴Ibid.

²⁶Ibid., p. 33.

²⁵Ibid., pp. 31-32.

²⁷Ibid., p. 34.

belief that Jesus really became the Messiah only with, or after, the Resurrection."²⁸

There are other possibilities which should be noted. Curtis Beach holds that "the main theme of Mark's Gospel is the messianic appointment, role, suffering, death, resurrection, and expected return of Jesus as 'the Son of Man.'"²⁹ And the disclosures of the messianic secret are "dramatizations of Christian doctrine and symbolize experiences in the life of the early Church."³⁰

Wayne G. Rollins thinks that "Mark's controlling interest is the Way that leads from the kingdom of men into 'the kingdom of God,' from death to life."³¹ Within this overall theme, the purpose of the messianic secret is to assure the crucifixion. If his Messiahship had been widely recognized and accepted, then Jesus would not have been crucified. And "if Jesus had not been crucified, scripture would not have been fulfilled (ch. 14:49). If scripture had not been fulfilled, the will of God, his plan for human salvation, would not have developed as planned (v. 36)."³²

²⁸John Knox, The Death of Christ (New York: Abingdon Press, 1958), pp. 102-103.

²⁹Curtis Beach, The Gospel of Mark (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1959), p. 45.

³⁰Ibid., pp. 46-47.

³¹Wayne G. Rollins, The Gospels: Portraits of Christ (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963), p. 44.

³²Ibid., p. 31.

Millar Burrows is one who does not believe the messianic secret to be a literary device on the part of the author. It is Burrow's opinion that if Jesus had not considered himself to be the Messiah at all, then "the fact that he was so different from what the Messiah was expected to be makes it all the more strange that his followers should ever have thought of regarding him as Messiah."³³

Bultmann maintains, however, that any attempt to think of the secret as a historical event in the life of Jesus "falls to pieces against the fact that its literary location is in the editorial sentences of the evangelist, not in the body of the traditional units."³⁴ Also, there is no evidence that Jesus spiritualized the conception of the Messiah's activity. Therefore, Bultmann believes that the secret is a theory of the evangelist set forth as "a veiling of the fact that faith in Jesus' Messiahship begins from belief in his resurrection."³⁵

Samuel Sandmel believes that the Gospel of Mark is basically a polemic against the disciples and that "the real clue to the 'secrecy' is the need to emphasize the

³³ Millar Burrows, An Outline of Biblical Theology (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1946), p. 92.

³⁴ Rudolf Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1954), I, 32.

³⁵ Rudolf Bultmann, History of the Synoptic Tradition (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), p. 346.

disciples' blindness."³⁶ Joseph B. Tyson is in agreement with Sandmel that Mark is written to counter the Christology of the disciples, especially their failure to recognize the necessity of Jesus' death. However, the disciples never fully recognized Jesus and their failure to do so "is not properly a part of the messianic secret motif."³⁷ Instead, the blindness of the disciples and their hardness of heart comprise a totally separate motif which gives Mark an opening to stress the necessity of Jesus' death and the true nature of his Messiahship, and secondly, to correct the disciples' misunderstanding of their own position in the koinonia.

There must be many more theories and possibilities which have not been presented, but one more shall be given in conclusion. Eric L. Titus agrees with Wrede that during his life Jesus did not make any messianic claims. The secret, therefore, is the explanation by the early church for Jesus' silence about his Messiahship. However, another possibility which Titus suggests in addition to this is that the messianic secret also provides the author with "a basis

³⁶ Samuel Sandmel, "Prolegomena to a Commentary on Mark," The Journal of Bible and Religion, XXXI:4 (October, 1963), 300.

³⁷ Joseph B. Tyson, "The Blindness of the Disciples in Mark," Journal of Biblical Literature, LXX:3 (September, 1961), 261.

for instruction as to the true character of Jesus' messiahship."³⁸

Looking back in retrospect, the presentation of all these different opinions, without criticizing or evaluating any of them, can be justified for several reasons. Aside from the simple fact that it is helpful to have the opinions of many scholars set forth in review, nothing else can illustrate so vividly the enigma of the Gospel of Mark in general and of the messianic secret in particular. Also, to a certain extent these many views serve as a critic each to the other. Certainly many of the different strengths and weaknesses of some of the suggested answers become apparent when considered in the light of competing theories. Consequently, some hypotheses can be easily dismissed, while others become useful guides to the understanding of Mark.

II. A NEW SOLUTION

Are there really any new possibilities which have not been suggested? After the foregoing summarizations one is inclined to think not. However, the purpose of the secret and the overall purpose of Mark have not previously been fitted together and stated in exactly the way which this writer believes may provide the best answer to all of the

³⁸Eric Lane Titus, Essentials of New Testament Study (New York: Ronald Press, 1958), p. 146.

many other problems involved in addition to the question of the messianic secret. In this sense, then, perhaps the following can be said to be a new solution, although there is certainly nothing original or new about any individual aspect of the answer in itself.

Going back now to the background against which Mark was written, especially significant is the Apostle Paul's general disregard for the historical Jesus, his great emphasis on the resurrection, and his adoptionistic view of Jesus' Messiahship which was also no doubt prevalent in the church at Rome (Romans 1:1-4). To be added to all this is the fact that the Gospel of Mark is indisputably Christologically centered. Of course, Jesus is the dramatic center of all the Synoptics, but it is only in Mark that he is the real center. In Matthew the real center is ethics and in Luke it is a theology of history.³⁹ Sherman Johnson would certainly concur that Mark is radically Christocentric by his statement that "the theology of Mark is essentially a Christology."⁴⁰ In the light of all this it is concluded, therefore, that the opening line of Mark--"Ἀρχὴ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ [υἱοῦ τοῦ Θεοῦ]" (The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, [Son of God])⁴¹--is to be

³⁹Rollins, op. cit., p. 33.

⁴⁰Sherman E. Johnson, The Gospel According to St. Mark (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960), p. 9.

⁴¹Many MSS and Church Fathers omit the phrase in

interpreted as meaning that the gospel per se begins with the historical Jesus, and not with the resurrection.

Commentators are agreed that the "εὐαγγελίου" (good news) here in 1:1 is not the book which the author is writing, or the message which Jesus preached, but rather it is the story about Jesus and God's activity through him. And this really began at his baptism. This, then, is the controlling theme of Mark, and this explains the entirely new type of Christian literature.

Since the Gospel is not polemical in style, however, one concludes that the author did not feel the need to vigorously oppose anything, especially Paul. Instead, the Gospel of Mark is more of a "gentle correction" for some who were either misinterpreting Paul or who were outdoing Paul in his relative disregard for the earthly ministry of Jesus. This is not to say, though, that the author did not feel strongly about their mistake and their need for correction. It is just that Mark very wisely chose to try to "lead" them into the truth rather than to "drive" them. After all, Paul was no heretic, and there were reasons for his taking the view he held. Paul's salvation did not come through

brackets, "οἰοῦ τοῦ Θεοῦ," but Johnson says that it is probably original (Johnson, The Gospel According to St. Mark, p. 32). Gould thinks so, too (Gould, op. cit., pp. 2-3), and so does Frederick C. Grant in his "The Gospel According to St. Mark: Exegesis," The Interpreter's Bible, VII, 648.

Jesus of Nazareth; he had never known the historical Jesus. Instead, his life had been changed as a result of his confrontation with the Risen Christ on the Damascus road.

Also, the facts were that Paul did make some allusions to things which Jesus had taught while he was here on earth,⁴² and he did stress at least the final aspect of the historical life of Jesus--the last supper and the cross--although it was, of course, in the closest connection with the resurrection.⁴³

In light of the fact that the Gospel is not polemical, and since its primary purpose was to serve as a gentle correction for a doctrinal error, then it could readily serve some secondary purposes as well--that is, if the material could be adapted to other purposes without interrupting the main thrust of the work. And indeed it could! In fact, the material at hand so easily lent itself to other purposes that anyone in the church at Rome could hardly have prevented its use for these secondary purposes even

⁴²Maurice Goguel is of the opinion that there are at least eight distinct allusions to Christ's words in the letters of Paul: I Thessalonians 4:8; Galatians 4:17; I Corinthians 4:12-13 and Romans 12:14; I Corinthians 5:4; 13:2; 13:3; II Corinthians 10:1; and Romans 14:14 (Maurice Goguel, The Life of Jesus [New York: Macmillan, 1933], pp. 126-127).

⁴³I Corinthians 1:17; 10:16; 11:20-34; Galatians 5:11; 6:12, 14; Philippians 2:8; 3:18; Colossians 1:20; 2:14 (for the authenticity of Colossians see supra, p. 41, n. 44).

if he had been so inclined. For example, it would be almost incredible to think that any sympathetic recounting of certain excerpts from the life of rejection and suffering which Jesus led would not encourage Christians in the face of persecution. This, in turn, is another explanation for the new type of literature. In fact, the more one thinks about it the more one is inclined to feel that a gospel could serve as a device for encouragement better than an epistle. It fit this need like a glove on a hand.

Secondly, in the strife between the Jewish and Gentile Christians over the Law, nothing could be more tailor-made to correct both the Jewish Christians' legalistic tendencies on the one hand, and the Gentile Christians' boastfulness of their freedom on the other hand. Jesus was in almost constant conflict with the Jewish authorities, and such passages as 3:1-6 and 7:1-8 point to an obvious correction of legalistic tendencies on the part of Jewish Christians. The following also illustrates this point very well:

One sabbath he was going through the grainfields; and as they made their way his disciples began to pluck ears of grain. And the Pharisees said to him, "Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the sabbath?" And he said to them, "Have you never read what David did, when he was in need and was hungry, he and those who were with him: how he entered the house of God, when Abiathar was high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and also gave it to those who were with him?" And he said to them, "The sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath; so the Son of man is lord even of the sabbath" (2:23-28).

And concerning the Gentiles' boastfulness, where is there

any room for boasting in the life of one who takes seriously such a passage as 9:33-50?

And they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, "What were you discussing on the way?" But they were silent; for on the way they had discussed with one another who was the greatest. And he sat down and called the twelve; and he said to them, "If any one would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all." And he took a child, and put him in the midst of them; and taking him in his arms, he said to them, "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me; and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me" (9:33-37).

And just to be sure that his readers get the point of all this, the author editorializes at the end of the long passage of 9:33-50, saying, "Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another" (9:50).⁴⁴

From the above two illustrations it is quite clear that some of the tradition which Mark received and passed on would serve the purpose of peacemaking whether the need existed or not. But since such a need did exist, one can only conclude that this was another, but less important, purpose for the work of Mark.

A third very obvious secondary purpose which this Gospel might serve, would be to explain the role of the Christian. Just as Christ had to suffer and be rejected, so must his followers:

And he called to him the multitude with his disciples, and said to them, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and

⁴⁴Grant, op. cit., VII, 794.

follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. For what does it profit a man, to gain the whole world and forfeit his life? For what can a man give in return for his life?" (8:34-37).

It remains now to be seen what the function of the messianic secret is in relation to the author's overall theme. To begin with, as was noted in the last chapter, there are two sides to the messianic secret: who Jesus is, and what is the nature of his task as the Messiah. It was also suggested that it is this latter part of the secret which is actually the most important. A careful study of the material reveals that the "what" aspect of the secret plays the major supporting role in the overall theme. The "who" aspect of the secret, in turn, supports the other half of the secret--rather than the major theme itself--and thus it becomes the lesser of the two parts of the secret.

The central thrust of Mark is that the "good news" really begins with the entire ministry of the historical Jesus. But the most important and significant aspect of the ministry of Jesus is his passion. Although Mark does not state it in these exact terms, it is his descent to the depth of abasement by which Christ is truly exalted. The resurrection was impossible without the crucifixion; the two are inseparably joined together. But even Paul would surely agree with this, so where is the disagreement between Paul and Mark? Simply in this: for Mark, it is not enough to just recognize the close connection between the crucifixion

and the resurrection; the entire prior ministry of Jesus is just as inseparable from the crucifixion-resurrection, as the crucifixion is from the exaltation. In other words, whereas the Paulinists viewed the death-resurrection as a single event, Mark adds the historical ministry of Jesus, and presents the life-death-resurrection as a single event. Hence, it is not just that the two go together; for Mark, the three go together. This is essentially the position Bultmann takes when he says: "This in fact marks the purpose of the author: the union of the Hellenistic kerygma about Christ . . . with the tradition of the story of Jesus."⁴⁵

It was the stressing of Jesus' resurrection and exaltation to the almost total exclusion of his historical ministry that Mark gently corrects. And it is this theme which the second half of the secret supports. As soon as Peter makes his confession that Jesus is the Christ, then Jesus begins at once to explain what it means to be the Christ: it means to suffer, be rejected, be killed, and then finally as a result, to rise again (8:31).

But the disciples are both unable and unwilling to accept such a definition of Messiahship. Again and again Jesus explains what the nature of his role is (9:10;

⁴⁵Bultmann, History of the Synoptic Tradition, p. 347.

10:32-34), but still they do not understand. In fact, time and again they reveal that as far as they are concerned, Jesus has kept the secret; they do not comprehend at all (14:37, 40, 41; 14:50, 54; 15:71)!

What is the real secret in the end, then? It is the Messiah's role. No one ever does understand until after the resurrection. Actually, though, Mark does not record any understanding at all--even after the resurrection. However, their eventual understanding is to be assumed. Mark has brought his story up to the very point where the traditional Hellenistic kerygma actually begins. From this point on the author does not need to tell the story--there is nothing further to correct.

Finally, how does the first half of the secret, the who, support the second half, the what? To begin with, the author probably did not have to try very hard to either think up the idea of the secret or to work it into his material. Just as it was observed that the material fit three secondary needs perfectly--the needs for encouraging Christians in the face of persecution, for reconciling rival factions within the church at Rome, and for explaining the role of Christians as they faced a hostile world--it likewise already contained the seed thoughts of the secret in rudimentary form.⁴⁶

⁴⁶There are other scholars, however, who believe that

In support of this point of view, Branscomb states that there is possibly "some actual tradition that He [Jesus] had tried to avoid the role of healer of the sick."⁴⁷ Grant, too, believes that there must have been elements of the secret which had some historical basis, and says that Jesus "may--he probably must--have silenced the strange, half-articulate ejaculations of the demons. . . ."⁴⁸

Also, as for the final revelation of the secret--the exclamation of the centurion--Branscomb states: "The remark of the Roman officer need not mean nothing [sic] more than that Jesus was a righteous individual and not a criminal."⁴⁹ Of course, however, the author uses the statement in an entirely different sense and it thus becomes the climax of his Gospel. But the point is, the statement as it is may have a historical basis and was undoubtedly in the tradition as Mark received it. It should be noted, though, that Mark

the messianic secret was much more than just "seed" thoughts and that they were not just in "rudimentary" form. Vincent Taylor, for instance, believes that the secret is inherent in the traditional materials which the author used, and says that the secret lies behind almost every narrative in the Gospel. He states that the secret "is not a hypothesis imposed on the records from without, but an element integral to the tradition itself" (Taylor, op. cit., p. 122). Cranfield agrees, and states that the secret was an "integral part of the history" (Cranfield, op. cit., p. 274).

⁴⁷Branscomb, op. cit., p. 96.

⁴⁸Grant, op. cit., VII, 644.

⁴⁹Branscomb, op. cit., p. 96.

and Luke vary in their readings at this point. In Mark the centurion says, "ἀληθῶς οὗτος ὁ ἄνθρωπος υἱὸς θεοῦ ἦν" (15:39),⁵⁰ but Luke has him say, "ὄντως ὁ ἄνθρωπος οὗτος δίκαιος ἦν" (23:47). Vincent Taylor believes, however, that the Lukan version is possibly the more primitive.⁵¹

If the view of these scholars is correct that the traditions which Mark received already contained at least some seed thoughts of the secret in rudimentary form, then he did not have to alter his material very radically in order to present the concept of progressive revelation of who Jesus was. This does not mean, however, that all of the suppressive statements--the commands to silence--are thought to be historical. But it does mean that these scholars believe that there were injunctions to silence by Jesus in at least part of the material. The form critics have to be reckoned with in this discussion, though, and it must be noted that Bultmann insists that the secret's "literary location is in the editorial sentences of the evangelist, not in the body of the traditional units."⁵²

⁵⁰That the centurion exclaimed, "Truly this man was the son of God," rather than "Truly this man was a son of God," can hardly be doubted. Titus states that "linguistic evidence supports the definite meaning which the dramatic and literary structure of Mark demands" (Titus, op. cit., p. 149). Also, see E. C. Colwell, "A Definite Rule for the Use of the Article in the Greek New Testament," Journal of Biblical Literature, LII:1 (1933).

⁵¹Taylor, op. cit., p. 597.

⁵²Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament, I, 32.

The one point which has been overlooked in all this discussion, though, is the fact that if the messianic secret is such an artificial device, why then did Mark not use it more consistently? There are five instances of healings where no injunctions to silence are recorded (1:29-31; 2:1-2; 3:1-6; 5:25-34; 10:46-52), and three instances of curing the demon possessed where silence is not enjoined (5:1-20; 7:25-30 [cured at a distance, however]; 9:15-29). In fact, after curing one demoniac Jesus said to him, "Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you" (5:19).

In view of the fact that Mark did not insert commands to silence after these eight occasions of healing and casting out demons, it must be concluded that the messianic secret should not be thought of as a completely artificial device. Instead, Mark simply recognized that a few hints of the secret were already contained within certain elements of the traditions, and the usefulness of the "who" to support the "what" was obvious. Part of the failure of scholars to adequately come to grips with the possibility of the secret being at least partly contained within the traditions is the undeniable brilliance of Mark. Surely the simplicity of Mark's style is misleading. As Sandmel points out, "Mark is replete with nuances and overtones, carefully put there by

the author."⁵³ Morton Scott Enslin also stresses this same point and says of the Gospel of Mark that we must "recognize it as the steady product of genius which, more effectively probably than we shall ever know, determined the pattern and character of early Christianity. . . ."⁵⁴

Whatever the form of the traditions Mark received, the fact remains that he took up these strands and wove them together into the theology he wanted to present.⁵⁵ No one could be expected to understand Jesus' role without first knowing who he was. This, then, was the purpose and the obvious usefulness of the first half of the secret--it became the basis for expecting that the second half could be understood, or at least for interpreting the Messiah's role in its true meaning.

The author of Mark no doubt felt that reinterpreting the Messianic role desperately needed to be done. In a sense, many Christians as late as his day still did not comprehend the secret;⁵⁶ otherwise, they would not have

⁵³Sandmel, op. cit., p. 299.

⁵⁴Morton Scott Enslin, "The Artistry of Mark," Journal of Biblical Literature, LXVI:4 (December, 1947), 392.

⁵⁵As Morton Scott Enslin states, "Mark is far more concerned with theology than with history" (Ibid., p. 393).

⁵⁶Joseph B. Tyson makes a strong case for the view that the disciples themselves had never gotten beyond the idea of a royal Messiahship even in Mark's day and, consequently, never did properly understand their own role in

detached the historical Jesus from the exalted Christ. Therefore, the author presents his Gospel as one more explanation of the Messiah's task for those who still did not understand that his role was to suffer, be rejected and be killed, for only then could he be exalted. Consequently, the entire ministry of the historical Jesus is an integral part of the story of the exalted Christ. This was the message which the messianic secret helped to tell.

III. SUMMARY

It was pointed out in the first chapter that there is a gap between the Epistle to the Romans and the Gospel of Mark. It was then established with a relative degree of certainty that the first was written by Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles, to the church at Rome--a predominantly Gentile church; and that the second was written within fifteen years later both from that same church and for the same church.

As for the Sitz im Leben of Mark, it was seen that there is considerable evidence which points to persecution from without and strife within the church at Rome. Also noted were the great doctrinal differences between Romans and the Gospel of Mark.

The facts that Mark does not make a polemical thrust, that it is Christologically centered, and that it is

the community (Tyson, op. cit., pp. 261-268).

concerned solely with the historical ministry of Jesus⁵⁷
 --beginning abruptly with his baptism and ending equally
 abruptly with the women's astonishment at the announcement
 that "He has risen"--all lead to the conclusion that the
 major purpose of Mark is to present the historical ministry
 of Christ as an integral part of the gospel. In fact, says
 Mark, this is where it all begins!

It was also concluded that there were at least three
 secondary purposes of the Gospel since its specific contents
 answered so well three very pressing needs: the need for
 encouragement in the face of persecution, healing in the
 midst of strife between the Jewish and Gentile Christians,
 and instruction on the role of the Christian as he seeks
 to follow his Lord.

Finally, the messianic secret was seen to be two-
 fold: who the Messiah is and what the Messiah does. The
 latter part is the more important because it explains why
 Jesus suffered and died--it was a necessary prelude to
 exaltation--and it also provides an opportunity to explain
 the Christian's role. The first part of the secret, in
 turn, provides the opportunity to explain the second part.
 In other words, the revelation of who he was and what his

⁵⁷The fact cannot be stressed too strongly that this
 is not to be taken to mean that Mark simply presents a life
 of Jesus. Not at all; this Gospel is a highly theological
 document, a record of the church's faith, rather than a
 biography.

role was go hand in hand. With this two-fold secret Mark instructs his readers "as to the true character of Jesus' messiahship."⁵⁸

⁵⁸Titus, op. cit., p. 146.

CHAPTER V

THE IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CHURCH'S MINISTRY

If the conclusion is correct that the major thrust of Mark is to show the entire earthly ministry of Jesus to be an integral part of the kerygma and to thus ground the gospel on his historic personage, then one may well inquire as to the importance of the historical Jesus for the church's ministry today. Also, if the further conclusion is correct that the purpose of the messianic secret in the over-all structure of Mark is to give instruction "as to the true character of Jesus' messiahship"¹ and to act, in turn, as a guide to the real nature of the Christian's role as he seeks to follow his Lord, then one wants to know what this, too, means for the ministry of the church today.

A practical application of this study will center then around these two specific questions. First, in the light of Mark's earlier "quest," what is the relevance of the present-day quest of the historical Jesus for the church's ministry? And second, in what way is the church's ministry to be directed by what the messianic secret reveals to be the true character of Jesus' messiahship and the Christians' role as they face the world?

¹Eric Lane Titus, Essentials of New Testament Study (New York: Ronald Press, 1958), p. 146.

I. THE QUEST OF THE HISTORICAL JESUS

The end of the eighteenth century witnessed the prevalence of three radically different approaches to Biblical interpretation. One was orthodox supernaturalism which viewed the Scriptures as comprising literal history correct in every detail. Second was rationalism which used the stories which were out of keeping with natural law as an opportunity for the interpreter to present his own plausible explanation of the original event lying behind the story. For example, the descent of the dove at the time of Jesus' baptism might be explained as a tame bird which was fortuitously fluttering about. Third was the mythical theory which saw almost no historical value in the Scripture and which was used primarily to discredit Christianity.²

By the early nineteenth century eclecticism was becoming the rule. Some parts of Scripture were regarded as myth, some were explained rationalistically, and still others--particularly the miracles surrounding Jesus--were accepted as pure supernatural history. In 1835-1836 David Friedrich Strauss published his two volume work, The Life of Jesus, Critically Examined. Strauss was opposed to all of the above approaches to Biblical criticism per se, yet the

²David Friedrich Strauss, The Life of Jesus, Critically Examined (New York: Calvin Blanchard, 1855), pp. 11-33.

mythical theory was for him the proper basic approach when applied in a more positive way--i.e., not to discredit Christianity but to get at the underlying factual events, especially those in the life of Jesus.³ Strauss saw mythical embellishments surrounding the records of every portion of Jesus' life and not just the accounts of his miracles or of his miraculous birth. There was not a single island of pure, untouched fact; myth-forming faith was evident throughout.

As might have been expected, this work of Strauss brought on persecution and completely ruined his career. But the important point for this study is that it spurred on the quest of the historical Jesus which had begun with the deist and Biblical critic Hermann Samuel Reimarus (1694-1768). This quest had no doubt been motivated by several things, but in particular it was felt that the Christian faith could be more firmly grounded in the historic Jesus than in any dogmatic doctrines about him. Consequently there was this rather negative motivation to show the difference between the historic Jesus and the exalted Christ of the kerygma. With the publication of Strauss' monumental work, though, there was another and even stronger motivation. The impression that the real Jesus was not essential to the kerygma had to be refuted.

³Ibid., pp. 869-901.

The quest of the historical Jesus was pursued primarily by German scholars and lasted some 130 years, terminating essentially in Albert Schweitzer's The Mystery of the Kingdom of God (1901). Five years later, in The Quest of the Historical Jesus, Schweitzer reviewed the quest and concluded that it had generally failed because the portrayal of Jesus had invariably been of one who was relevant to the nineteenth century and, thus, the picture was badly distorted. Actually Jesus was thoroughly a man of his own time who held a completely different, pre-scientific world-view. Also, Jesus expected an imminent, cataclysmic end of history after which the Kingdom of God would be established.⁴

But the quest of the historical Jesus was also doomed to failure because its method of historical criticism--as demonstrated especially by Julius Wellhausen and Wilhelm Wrede--clearly established that it was impossible to get back to the Jesus of history.⁵ Our only sources, the Gospels, were shown to be anything but biographies of Jesus. Instead, they were composed only of isolated pericopes which had no chronological relationship to each other. Moreover, historical criticism showed them to be highly theological documents which primarily presented the

⁴Albert Schweitzer, The Quest of The Historical Jesus (London: A. & C. Black, 1925), pp. 328-395.

⁵Reginald H. Fuller, The New Testament in Current Study (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1962), p. 29.

church's faith and kerygma rather than the simple life of Jesus.

The quest of the historical Jesus had essentially ended with Wrede and Schweitzer, and for awhile it appeared that it was dead forever. However, the early twentieth century saw the almost simultaneous rise of form criticism and dialectical theology, and the leaders of these two movements were totally undaunted by the failure of the quest or the conclusion that such a quest was impossible. While this conclusion had been devastating to both conservative and liberal Protestantism, such scholars as Barth, Brunner, Bultmann and Tillich were now free to be both Biblical and historically honest. As Van A. Harvey explains, they could be Biblical because the kerygma of neither Paul nor John was "at all concerned with the religious self-consciousness or 'personality' of Jesus; historically honest because statements about the 'personality' and 'life' of Jesus could find no justification in the historical sources."⁶

But the dialectical theologians went even beyond the view that the Gospels were "shaped for 'kerygmatic' rather than historical purposes."⁷ They went so far as to contend "that to concern oneself at all with the problem of the

⁶Van A. Harvey, "The Historical Jesus, The Kerygma, and Christian Faith," Religion in Life, XXXIII:3 (Summer, 1964), p. 432.

⁷Fuller, op. cit., p. 27.

historical Jesus was to deny the true nature of faith. . . ." ⁸ The object of faith was the kerygma, not the historical Jesus. In fact, they maintained that "the history of Jesus was irrelevant for faith." ⁹

This position did not seem sound to many, and it came under increasing attack. A typical rebuttal was that of T. W. Manson who argued that "if God did in fact speak to us through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus it is vitally important to know fully and as accurately as possible what sort of life and death and resurrection became the medium of the divine revelation." ¹⁰

It was Donald M. Baillie, however, who set forth the most extensive and influential critique of both form criticism and dialectical theology relative to the importance of the historic Jesus for faith. Baillie maintained that there was "no stability in a position which accepts to the full the humanity of Jesus but has no interest in a concrete manifestation and doubts whether it can be recaptured at all. . . ." ¹¹ He called for a return to the historical Jesus and said that it was "defective theologically" to

⁸Ibid., p. 28.

⁹Ibid., p. 29.

¹⁰T. W. Manson, "The Life of Jesus: Some Tendencies in Present-Day Research," in The Background of The New Testament and Its Eschatology, W. D. Davies and D. Daube, Eds. (London: Cambridge University Press, 1956), p. 221.

¹¹D. M. Baillie, God Was in Christ (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948), p. 28.

insist on the "'once-for-all-ness' of this divine incursion into history" yet renounce "all desire or claim to know what it was really like."¹² Furthermore, argued Baillie,

If it is true that 'no man can say, Jesus is Lord, except in the Holy Spirit,' it is equally true that no man can say it in the truly Christian sense, except through a knowledge of what Jesus actually was, as a human personality, in the days of his flesh.¹³

This position of Baillie seemed so sensible and balanced that the problem was overlooked momentarily whether such knowledge was possible. As Harvey points out, "there is no logical connection between theological necessity and historical possibility. . . ."¹⁴ The chief obstacle lay in the fact that the problem of the sources remained the same as ever--they were fragmentary, disconnected, and witnessed more to the life and dogma of the early church than to the life of Jesus.

In the meantime the demythologizing debate gave a new urgency to the question of the relationship between the Jesus of history and the kerygma. Certain of Bultmann's followers (Buri, Ogden) insisted that there was an inconsistency in his existentialist interpretation of the Biblical symbols or myths, and that a more consistent interpretation of the Biblical symbols would solve the problems in Baillie's position. In their opinion, "the only utterance

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ibid., p. 52.

¹⁴Harvey, op. cit., p. 433.

he did not consistently demythologize was that one referring to the decisive act of God in the cross of Christ. . . ."¹⁵ Bultmann had insisted upon the total incapacity of man to save himself; instead, he held that "the New Testament speaks and faith knows of an act of God through which man becomes capable of self-commitment, capable of faith and love, of his authentic life."¹⁶

This insistence by Bultmann upon a unique and redemptive act of God was what was held by Buri and Ogden to be his fundamental inconsistency. Their view was that "the incapacity of man to save himself only implies that God's grace is prevenient, not that it occurs only in Jesus of Nazareth."¹⁷

The most influential students of Bultmann (Kasemann, Fuchs, Ebeling, Bornkamm) became genuinely alarmed and viewed this as a very serious misreading of their teacher's position. They sought to point out that it was a mistake to believe that absolutely nothing could be known about the historical Jesus. Indeed, considerable facts could be known about Jesus.¹⁸ And furthermore, James Robinson

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Rudolf Bultmann, "New Testament and Mythology," in Kerygma and Myth: A Theological Debate, Hans Werner Bartsch, Ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), p. 33.

¹⁷Harvey, op. cit., p. 434.

¹⁸See Gunther Bornkamm, Jesus of Nazareth (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960), pp. 49-55.

argued in A New Quest of the Historical Jesus (1959) that although the old quest was dead, it is both necessary and possible to have a new quest.

Robinson takes the view that such a new quest becomes possible in the light of a new understanding of history. In his opinion "the nineteenth century saw the reality of the 'historical facts' as consisting largely in names, places, dates, occurrences, sequences, causes, effects--things which fall far short of being the actuality of history."¹⁹ The new view of history, on the other hand, is grounded in the purposes and meanings which lie behind the external facts--not in the facts themselves.

This new quest of the historical Jesus is a revolt against the position of the dialectical theologians that the historic Jesus is irrelevant for faith and Bultmann's demythologizing of the myths of the kerygma--"pre-existence, incarnation, atonement, resurrection, ascension--all interpretive rather than objective statements."²⁰ Also, while the old quest sought to expose the difference between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith, the new quest seeks to demonstrate the historical continuity and the material relation between Jesus and the kerygma. Of course,

¹⁹James M. Robinson, A New Quest of the Historical Jesus (Naperville: Allenson, 1959), p. 28.

²⁰Fuller, op. cit., p. 30.

it goes without saying that the two are not identical. The first was the Proclaimer while the second is concerned with the Proclaimed. In other words, Jesus "proclaimed, not that God had acted decisively, but that he was in the process of acting and was about to act decisively."²¹ This was not the message of the early church, however; "the earliest church proclaimed that God had acted directly and decisively in Jesus."²² So while the Proclaimer and the Proclaimed are not the same, the post-Bultmannians claim that there is a definite continuity between the two.

It is the contention of those engaged in the "New Quest," particularly Robinson, that this new view of history provides another avenue of access to the historic Jesus besides the kerygma. And while the recovery of Jesus' existential selfhood may never be possible, the essential continuity between his message and deeds, on the one hand, and the kerygma of the early church, on the other, is strongly believed to have been established. Consequently, the "New Questers" have increasingly modified Bultmann's tendency to distinguish between the proclamation of Jesus and the kerygma, and have strongly stressed the continuity between the two.

Van A. Harvey has reminded us that "the new quest

²¹ Ibid., p. 52.

²² Ibid.

is still a quest, a seeking, and not yet a finding."²³

Perhaps the sources are such that it can never be anything else but a quest. Nonetheless it must continue on because the church cannot afford to lose its concern for the earthly Jesus. He never has been and never will be irrelevant for faith. The kerygma must be balanced with the historic Jesus; otherwise, as Nils Alstrup Dahl warns, "we shall be in danger of lapsing into a 'kerygma-theological' doctism."²⁴

This problem is not new; in fact, the author of Mark would have felt very much at home with today's post-Bultmannians and their new quest of the historical Jesus. Eduard Schweizer points out that by the time this earliest Gospel was written there was an imposing "theology of the kerygma" arising which had almost nothing to do with Jesus. The doctrine of grace and justification by faith was all that was needed. Thus, as Schweizer states, "Jesus was a mere name without much meaning, a symbol, maybe, for the kerygma, but not more."²⁵

The dangers in this situation were startling.

²³Harvey, op. cit., p. 437.

²⁴Nils Alstrup Dahl, "The Problem of the Historical Jesus," in Kerygma and History, Carl E. Braaten and Roy A. Harrisville, Eds. (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), p. 138.

²⁵Eduard Schweizer, "Mark's Contribution to the Quest of the Historical Jesus," New Testament Studies, X:4 (July, 1964), 421.

Schweizer asks, "Why, therefore, not connect the kerygma with Hermes or Attis or any other saviour?" He then proceeds to explain that "the Gnostics were about to draw this consequence."²⁶

In view of these theological dangers the importance of Mark's work can hardly be overemphasized. Without any real prototypes he wrote a gospel consisting mainly of stories of God's acting with Jesus, and Jesus' acting with men. As Schweizer explains, "Mark's most essential theological insight is his conviction that God's deeds in Jesus Christ are the kernel of the gospel. . . ."²⁷ Here is a definite attempt to show that God's revelation took place in the historical events comprising the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth--a real, earthly man. Schweizer maintains that "Christianity would cease to be Christianity, if Jesus had not lived and died. In this sense, the historical Jesus is, in the highest possible degree, essential for the faith of the church."²⁸

This does not mean, however, that one could see anything truly helpful in the historical Jesus "without the miracle of God's Spirit who, in the word of the witness, opens our blind eyes to the 'dimension' in which all these events took place."²⁹ For as Schweizer further points out,

²⁶Ibid.

²⁸Ibid., p. 431.

²⁷Ibid., pp. 421-422.

²⁹Ibid.

"the best historical reports, the best insights into the psychology of Jesus cannot replace or even support the service of the kerygma which calls us to faith and conveys faith to us."³⁰

Just what is, then, the importance of the life and death of Jesus as reported by Mark? Schweizer says that "it manifests for the believer what the kerygma really means."³¹ It makes all the difference in the world for our faith whether Jesus was actually crucified, or whether he died on a death bed from old age, painless and well attended. The bare fact that he lived and died does not suffice for faith. It is the kind of a life he lived and manner of his death which really demonstrate what dying for our sake means. Mark shows this; and more than anyone else in the New Testament Mark depicts that faith always means discipleship--following Jesus.³²

Certainly there is a basis in Mark for the quest of the historical Jesus. Indeed, it all began with him. Mark is saying, in effect, that there is a definite relationship between the Proclaimer and the Proclaimed. In fact, in a very real sense the two are one.

It must be pointed out, however, that the historical Jesus does not convey faith to us. As Schweizer explains,

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid., p. 432.

"This is the work of the kerygma of the church--but . . . he indeed keeps our faith from becoming unfaith or distorted faith."³³ Ernest Cadman Colwell echoes this same concern for the grounding of the kerygma on the historic Jesus and points out that "the unbroken testimony of the Church is that what these Gospels say is essential for our faith. The Good News begins here!"³⁴

What specifically does this mean for the church's ministry today? First of all, it pins the object of man's faith down to something specific. There is every indication that this is an age in which man is preoccupied with his existential situation and finds it difficult to think in terms of the abstract. Our imaginations are only seized by the concreteness of events. A return to the historical Jesus is not required in order to defend the faith or kerygma, but as Harvey points out, "because we humans only seem to decide concerning the truth about life in general when confronted by a life in particular."³⁵ In other words, "the Christian community confesses this has happened to it and that it can happen again and again to those who are grasped by the image of the historical Jesus."³⁶ Then

³³Ibid.

³⁴Ernest Cadman Colwell, Jesus and The Gospel (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 41.

³⁵Harvey, op. cit., p. 450.

³⁶Ibid.

Harvey asks,

May it not be the case that the Gospel and its essential scandal can be made far clearer and more intelligible to modern men if interpreted in terms of the man Jesus, who proclaimed the radical demand of God but also associated with tax collectors and harlots and was crucified for just this understanding of life, than in terms of a dying and rising Savior God or the only begotten son who existed before all worlds and who was crucified as the atonement for the sins of mankind and raised again to the Father?³⁷

The conclusion of this study leads to an unqualified positive response in answer to Harvey's question. Yes, the radical demand of God and the scandal of the cross can be understood only in terms of the real and historic man--Jesus of Nazareth. As Colwell has said, "the Good News begins here!"³⁸

II. THE CHURCH'S MINISTRY IN LIGHT OF THE MESSIANIC SECRET

The greatest problem which confronts the church and the ministry today is this: how can the Christian message be communicated to modern man in such a way as to challenge him to a genuine decision? It would appear at first glance that the messianic secret of Mark does not make the problem any easier. How can one reconcile the exhortation of the church to Christians to openly confess Christ and tell others the good news of salvation, while Mark pictures Jesus

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Colwell, loc. cit.

as requiring silence on the part of all who either confessed him or were helped by him? What might Mark be telling the church by means of the messianic secret?

Perhaps one can get some meaningful help by dividing the charge to silence into three different categories: the demons, the healing miracles, and the disciples. These categories actually comprise only about half the secret as presented by Mark but they lead up to the most central and crucial point of the entire Gospel: "But who do you say that I am?" (8:29). For Mark, this is the most important question in the life of every man--not what others say about Jesus, but who is he for me?

Silence is first demanded of the demons. But why? And what might this say to the church today? First of all, assuming that there may have been some historical basis in the fact that Jesus silenced the demented ravings of the "possessed" whom he met, it is hardly likely that he merely resented the revealing of his "secret." It hardly seems likely that any crowd would take such ravings seriously, and that this crowd did not do so is indicated by the fact that they were only "amazed" at Jesus' authority over unclean spirits (1:27), and anything the "possessed" man said is completely ignored. James W. Leitch has done a very fine study of Jesus' injunctions to silence and points out that if there is indeed any historical basis here, then "it is much more probable that what roused His anger was not the

confession itself, but that it should be made by them--unclean spirits who, for all that, still remained unclean and fundamentally hostile to him."³⁹

This is the point which is made in the Epistle of James: "Even the demons believe--and shudder. . . . [But] faith apart from works is barren" (2:19-20). In other words, here is an ever-relevant warning that even the highest-sounding confession, which is not accompanied by change and newness of life, is a work of the devil and would be better not made at all.⁴⁰ The church today, as ever, must not be content with cheap confessions--whether they be made in the "liberal" churches by those who simply add their name to the church role and have no accompanying change of heart, or by others who make only a superficial emotional response to the "fundamentalist" preacher who is interested only in getting people to the altar so that a few more "numbers" can be added to his list of those who have been "saved" under his preaching. Mark is here telling the church that confessing Christ, in and of itself--and especially without any devotion to him--does not mean a thing!

The second phase of the secret centers around four

³⁹James W. Leitch, "The Injunctions of Silence in Mark's Gospel," The Expository Times, LXVI:6 (March, 1955), 178.

⁴⁰Ibid.

healing miracles, after each of which Jesus sternly forbade any reporting of what he had done (1:40-44; 5:35-43; 7:31-36; 8:22-26). It would seem that what Jesus sought to prevent here was any false or superficial confession which might be based solely on the fact that he was a great miracle-worker and healer of physical ailments and diseases.

Mark emphasizes the secret by the immediate withdrawal of Jesus from the scene after many of his miracles. He was forced into the "country" as a result of the leper's disobedience (1:44-45); into a "lonely place" after the healings of Capernaum (1:35); after restoring the ruler's daughter "he went away from there" (5:35-6:1); there was immediate dismissal of the crowd and withdrawal for prayer after the feeding of the multitudes (6:45-46; 8:9-10); finally, there was the hurried cure of the epileptic before a crowd could gather (9:25-30).

Jesus' apparent embarrassment and obvious withdrawal are a clear indication that he did not wish what were really acts of compassion to be made the basis of any reputation for satisfying either the curiosity or the selfish interests of men. It is interesting to note that where there is evidently no danger of this, then there is no injunction to silence (2:10; 3:1-6; 5:34; 7:29; 10:52). In fact, after "releasing" the demoniac of Gerasene Jesus says, "Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you" (5:19).

But where such undesirable reputation was likely to get started Jesus tried to combat it, either by imposing silence or withdrawing, or as on one occasion by simply emphasizing his real mission (2:8-10). Leitch believes that there is a real historical core evident here, and while those who came to Jesus out of mere curiosity or selfish interests were not rejected, "it was painfully clear that their concentration on mere outward events rendered them blinder than ever to the real significance of what was happening."⁴¹

The point of all this for the present study is this: is the knowledge of Christ given primarily in the knowledge of his benefits? This was long ago the dictum of Melancthon--"hoc est Christum cognoscere--beneficia eius cognoscere"⁴²--and Leitch states that it has more recently been the position of both Ritschlians and Bultmann. Leitch agrees that their motives are noble because by insisting on the practical benefits of Christ they mean to safeguard against thinking of him abstractly and "so turn Him into an ideal Figure out of all contact with the everyday world."⁴³ However, in spite of the fact that their motives may be ever so good, the result is the same as it was in Mark's day--the true nature of Christ is obscured.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 179.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Ibid.

Leitch points out that Mark's lesson, which is very applicable in our day, is that Christ cannot be approached primarily from the standpoint of physical blessings or even of man's needs.

If it is wrong to speak abstractly of Christ apart from his benefits, it is equally wrong to speak of them except as his benefits. And if the two cannot properly be separated, yet the order is surely important: first Christ must be recognized for what he is, and only then can his benefits be understood. To reverse that order and make human needs, as they appear to us, the basis for our description of the Christ who satisfied them, is almost inevitably to misunderstand both.⁴⁴

One who does come to Christ out of the wrong motive, however, is not left with just the impossible alternative of either keeping silent or reversing his normal order of thinking which is grounded in self-interest and which results in blindness to the truth. Instead, he is "pointed rather to the Christ by whose grace blind eyes can be opened and right thinking become possible."⁴⁵

The third phase of the secret centers around the disciples. Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi was certainly more than the mere lip-service of the demons which were hostile to Christ even while acknowledging who he was. It was more, too, than the excited acclamations of those who either experienced or witnessed the power of a great miracle-worker but saw no further than that. The confession of Peter is from one who is committed to personal

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 180.

discipleship. Nevertheless, Peter receives the same stern command to silence, although the reason is undoubtedly different. This time the admonition was neither because Peter or the other disciples did not either recognize the truth, nor were they set on opposing it. Instead, although they had caught at least a glimpse of the truth, they had totally missed its meaning. In fact, as soon as Peter had made his confession, he began to interpret it according to his own ideas of what messiahship implied. Although Peter was a committed follower, the rebuke by Jesus shows just how serious and significant Peter's misunderstanding really was. For all practical purposes he was a "satan"--literally an adversary--not by intention, but nonetheless in fact.⁴⁶

The same thing was true at the transfiguration. Mark presents it as nothing less than a divine revelation--nothing false and nothing superficial--yet, it was only a flash of illumination which was suddenly gone without having been properly understood or assimilated at all. In fact, just how little they had understood it is shown by the ensuing wrangle about who was to be the greatest in the approaching kingdom (9:33-34). Of course, most scholars believe that the transfiguration was a post-resurrection experience placed back into the lifetime of Jesus. But by placing it here, Mark highlights the disciples' subsequent

⁴⁶ Ibid.

actions and makes the point that they were so full of their own ideas of messiahship that they could not take in even the most detailed predictions by Jesus. Leitch makes the observation that "it is not easy to fill a vessel that is already full, or to teach those who already 'know.'"⁴⁷

This is largely our trouble today. We are surely much more familiar with the truth of Christ than the disciples were. With all the hindsight provided by the Gospels we have had impressed on our minds the nature of the events leading up to and surrounding the crucifixion. In even greater detail and with greater clarity we have been taught that the way of Christ is the way of the cross. Yet it is very easy to have only a superficial or intellectual knowledge of who Jesus was, if, indeed, not a totally false conception. As Leitch explains, "there is a vast difference between merely apprehending the truth and being apprehended by it. In the one case it is recognized, only to be fitted into the framework of our existing conceptions . . . in the other it becomes central, dominating and transforming all else."⁴⁸

This is the point at which the disciples' misunderstanding becomes supremely relevant for today. It is an apt illustration of the fact that what so often hinders our understanding of the truth of Christ is the fact that we

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 181.

already know it all so well! But too often we know it only as a cold, lifeless theory--something to be acted on or not according to our own discretion--and not as the very foundation and driving force of our lives.

Looking at the messianic secret from this rather simple point of view, there is one rather obvious conclusion which can be made. Christ was against anything short of a full confession of his messiahship. In other words, it must spring from both a recognition of who he is and an understanding of what messiahship involves.

The demons remind one that it is easy to profess the Lordship of Christ while remaining only half-way committed or even hostile to his cause. But silence would be far better than a confession of this sort. Without a real intention of positive obedience and personal commitment, the most profound insights of theology are void of grace and become worse than ignorance.

Also, the "Christ" who is simply the panacea of all man's ills is not the true Christ. Man must seek Christ himself first, and not just seek his blessings in and of themselves. Christ still hides himself from those who would "come and take him by force to make him king" (John 6:15). To claim a faith that rests primarily on man's physical need is not to serve Christ but to hinder him, for it will be forever a reversal of the true order of things to put "all these things" ahead of "his kingdom and his righteousness"

(Matthew 6:33).

But most subtly dangerous of all is the confession which is made in all sincerity, but which interprets Christ in its own terms. Any view of Christ which leaves out the cross, and any view of discipleship which rejects his way of suffering and rejection, can never issue a true and meaningful confession. If one is going to have a really vital theology and a faith worth living, then one must accept Christ on his own terms and embrace the role and meaning of discipleship as Christ presents it. And if the church is going to have a message really worth proclaiming, then it must communicate a Christ and a way of discipleship which knows no exaltation except by way of the cross.

III. SUMMARY

It has been pointed out thus far that not only is the quest of the historical Jesus legitimate, it is absolutely essential. In fact, this is the very point which Mark makes, that the Christ of the kerygma is one with the Jesus of history: "And he said to them, 'Do not be amazed; you seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen, he is not here . . .'" (16:6). In other words, it was in the life of a very real man, the historic Jesus, that God's revelation took place. Secondly, even with all the knowledge which one can gain from the quest of the historical Jesus, one will continue to be just as blind to the truth

as were the disciples without the kerygma to balance the historic Jesus. Even the very best historical reports cannot open one's eyes; only God's Spirit, in the word of the witness, can do that. Thirdly, the earthly life of Jesus is most important for faith and ethics. His death manifests what it really means "to give his life as a ransom for many" (10:45). And his life alone shows what the way of discipleship is really like. Jesus does this partly by being an ethical example, but also, as Schweizer points out, "by taking men into his fellowship, by letting men be with him in his earthly life."⁴⁹ However, in view of the fact that faith involves the whole of life--thinking, feeling, acting--and cannot be lived except ethically, then the ethical importance of the historic Jesus is not to be minimized.

The messianic secret is used by Mark essentially to explain what both Lordship and discipleship truly mean. As one studies through the progressive injunctions to silence, from the demons to the disciples, it becomes evident that only the person who willingly forsakes all and shares Christ's way with him can ever really know him. The confession of Christ on the lips of anyone else is really only an empty, meaningless formula and is better left unsaid. As Eduard Schweizer states, "Only the disciple can know who

⁴⁹Schweizer, op. cit., p. 432.

Jesus really is."⁵⁰ And one might add, only the disciple can really confess him to be the Christ.

IV. CONCLUSION

The primary objective of this study was to answer two questions: What is the function of the messianic secret in the overall purpose of Mark, and what then are its implications for the church's ministry? Mark was seen to be very definitely Christologically centered and is concerned solely with the historical ministry of Jesus. Hence, it is concluded that the major purpose of Mark is to present the historical ministry of Jesus as an integral part of the gospel. As was pointed out, the Good News begins here! Within this overall purpose of Mark, the messianic secret provides the opportunity to explain both the way of the Messiah--which is the way of suffering, rejection, and the cross--and the way of the disciple--which, in turn, is the way of the Messiah.

The primary implications of this study for the church's ministry centered first of all around the new quest of the historical Jesus. It was seen that the quest is both necessary and possible, and further, that it is actually motivated by the very same concerns which Mark had when he

⁵⁰Eduard Schweizer, Lordship and Discipleship (Naperville: Alec R. Allenson, 1960), p. 21.

wrote his Gospel. Secondly, the true meaning of confessing Christ was seen to involve discipleship in the very deepest sense. No one can truly and meaningfully call Jesus the Christ unless he is willing to "deny himself and take up his cross and follow" him (8:34). This must be the message of the church; cheap discipleship is no discipleship at all!

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